LOS ANGELES ART COMMUNITY: GROUP PORTRAIT

Millard Sheets

Interviewed by George M. Goodwin

VOLUME II

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TAPE NUMBER: VII, SIDE ONE

JANUARY 6, 1977

GOODWIN: In 1955 you became the director of Otis Art Institute. How did that come about?

SHEETS: Well, that's the kind of a thing that can happen, I guess, once or twice in a person's lifetime. During the winter, before I started at Otis in the fall, I had a terrible accident with a horse. The horse threw his head back, broke my cheekbone. I had a crack that went halfway around my head; it just knocked the hell out of me. I was spending considerable time at home after the operations that they had to make after the ten days waiting for the concussion to heal. I had a call from John Anson Ford, and from Mrs. [Leiland Atherton] Irish, who was a great person in Los Angeles in those days. She had done so much for music. She'd worked on many philanthropic boards, and she was a member of the board of the Otis Art Institute, as was Mr. Ford, who then was a county supervisor. They called me to see if they could come out and discuss with me the possibility of hiring a new director for Otis Art Institute.

I held them off for about a week until I felt a little better. They came out, and we had a very interesting afternoon discussing the problem. I pointed out rather quickly in our conversation that I felt it would be difficult to get a director for the Otis Art Institute. The institute

had slowly run down to the point that there were students that had been there for twelve years. They were professional students, and they had a kind of an atmosphere that wasn't at all like it was in the early days of Roscoe [Edwin R.] Schroder and the early days of the institute. I said I didn't believe they could get a director that was worth anything, worth his salt or her salt, to come there and direct the school as it was being operated. They said, "Well, how should it be operated?" I made the inevitable mistake of saying many things about what I thought should be done in a school of that kind. [tape recorder turned off]

I believe deeply that a school, to be supported by the public, should function in a unique way and do something that a private school could not do. I felt that there was a great need for a top art school that wasn't entirely commercial and wasn't entirely aesthetic, that somewhere between the thing that is being done in most of the colleges and most of the art schools, there could be some absolutely sound, basic training in the skills in art on a high level of taste with a good, strong background for the artist. I outlined this in general to these nice people.

Well, they were quite interested in what I had to say, but they said, "Look, would you be willing to meet with our board after you've had some time to outline what you think the Los Angeles County Art Institute should be--the kind

of curriculum, the kind of a program, whether it should be formalized and so on--and then meet with us in a leisurely way some evening in Los Angeles and talk to the whole board?" Well, having nothing else to do except to wait to get over this terrible head injury, I did a lot of thinking about it, and I wrote down a real concept for a school. I went, at their invitation, and presented my ideas.

I remember we met at the California Club, and I outlined what I felt was a solid, major institute of art, where students could go in any direction they wanted if they were sufficiently trained in the total aspect of art. In other words, I felt that they needed not only to draw and to paint if they wished to be painters, but they should have adequate training in design and sculpture, some in architecture, so that these people would be able to roll with the punch and do things that the average student isn't able to do, what most of the students, really, as they come out of school today are not able to do. I said I felt that unless the Otis Art Institute was this type of school, I didn't see any reason for it to exist. I thought it should go out of business. We have a good school in the Art Center which is a more commercially oriented school. Within its sphere, I think it's doing as fine a job as any school in the United States. I think it's doing it today as it was in those days. I felt that there were plenty of colleges giving all of the aesthetic hocus-pocus, that we didn't

need to get into that area. This school should do something that was really needed, and I made the point that the tremendous growth in industry here, the tremendous need for redesigning our whole city and surroundings, both from an ecological point of view and from an aesthetic point of view, we needed artists who were trained as people who could work with business people, with industry, with politicians, who could stand on their own feet and hold their ground in a way that I think an educated person can.

To my surprise, they became very enthusiastic about this idea. Finally, at the end of the meeting, John Anson Ford said, "Well, Millard, would you become the director if we made it into that kind of a school?" I said, "John, I'm as safe as though I were in God's pocket because you'll never have the courage to turn the faculty upside down, hire new staff, build the necessary buildings, and support it as it would have to be supported. So I feel very safe in saying that yes, I would, because it would be a tremendously exciting challenge if you did it. But I just don't believe that with all the best of intentions on the part of this board, that you can do it in Los Angeles."

Well, it just happened that they went to work, and after about two months they came to me with an extremely firm proposal about the way they were going to support this school. I asked for a leave of absence from Scripps, where I was very happy. I was completely my own boss; I had the

most marvelous staff, the greatest relationship with the students and faculty, and lived there, and my children were growing up there in Claremont. I felt that it was almost impossible to really leave Scripps, so I asked for a leave of absence, and I said that I would like to get the school started and as soon as possible train a director to take my place.

Well, what of course happened was that it took a full year to plan the school and to hire the new faculty, which meant I had to have another year's leave of absence. Of course, we planned the building, we planned all the new courses, and it was a very exciting moment in my life. I think that the staff we brought together in the beginning were absolutely devoted to this basic idea of interplay between the various facets of art training, the various skills. At the same time, we were able to get the students very excited about the idea of an artist being really educated. It was a very tough thing, on the other hand, to have to really let go the majority of the old faculty and to remove from the school about 95 percent of the students who had been going there. There were some stories in that that are just incredible, if I ever told them, but I think they are better left unsaid.

However, by the beginning of the second year, we had started the new building. We were still working in part of the old building, and we'd torn down the original front

building, which was the old Otis mansion, where I'd had my office. We built a part of a new building, where I moved my office and started work.

We set the level very high, starting at the second-year-college level. The requirement was that they should have a minimum of two years of college or, hopefully, four years of college. We were as tough in checking their transcripts as any other college or university would be. Then, of course, in addition to satisfactory work in college, which proved to us that they had an intellectual capacity, we demanded a strong portfolio. I think, considering the fact that we were starting from scratch, that we had an extraordinary group of students in those first years, because we kept the standard high. The county agreed that we didn't have to fill it up with a lot of bodies, that they were willing to let it grow. I think we started with about eighty-five students, with a staff of six major, full professors and about that many assistant professors. It meant that we had a very high proportion of professor-to-student, which I think is better education anyway.

In the main, it worked very well. It is true that I probably made a few mistakes on appointments, because you can't always know how a person will truly react, even though they wish to agree in principle with the philosophy. I made two or three appointments that didn't turn out right

in the sense that they were basically such individualists that they didn't really want to be a part of a larger team concept.

GOODWIN: Who were some of the people you brought to the school, some of the faculty?

SHEETS: On the first faculty, Richard Haines was head of painting; Renzo Fenci was the head of sculpture; Peter Voulkos was the head of the ceramic department; oh, the man from Pasadena Junior College (who, I understand, is back at Otis now) [Leonard] Edmondson, was the head of design; and [Herbert] Jepson, who was a marvelous teacher, was the head of drawing. Those were the key, basic, full professors. I didn't even have an assistant. I didn't have a dean, even. We started cold, and I worked very closely with the staff.

GOODWIN: Were you teaching also?

SHEETS: I didn't actually teach, but I spent a tremendous amount of time with the students: in conference, in discussion, in advice. I spent a great deal of time with almost every student before they came in to the school, and then I followed through with them. I did do quite a bit of lecturing on my concept of the relation of art to society and some art history. We had a top man from USC in art history [John Braun]. He was one of the best lecturers at USC at that time. We had a doctor who was a brilliant man in anatomy. He's a good painter in his

own right. He's a doctor, but he paints as an avocation. He's an excellent painter. He taught anatomy--not in a dull, pedantic way, but in a very creative way. He worked very closely with Jepson. We had other people, like Joe Mugnani, and we had other painters. I should get a list and show you the list, but I can hand you that later.

GOODWIN: Did you bring anyone from Scripps?

SHEETS: No, I did not. I did not feel that it was right for me to do that. Well, I did bring two or three of the Scripps professors in--one on history--but not in a sense of taking them away from Scripps. This was a matter of their coming in, perhaps, for two lectures a week. I had two or three people from Scripps that did that, but I didn't take anyone from the art staff. I didn't feel it was right, and also I felt always I was going back to Scripps.

Well, it took longer than I thought it would to get this program into gear. I think it was about the third or fourth year that I felt we were really beginning to move, in the full sense. We had a lot of people in industry, a lot of people in various facets of business, really looking at our school with the thought that they could get a very thoroughly trained person. Of course, out of that group came young people like Tom Van Sant, who has done incredible things all over the world. He was the second graduate. Our first graduate was in ceramics, Paul Soldner, who later became the head of the ceramic department at Scripps and

is known now all over the world. I think the first thirty or forty graduates were all people who really made names everywhere.

Then, as so often happens, I think we developed a combination of many things. For one thing, I had become so deeply involved in my own professional work that I had to give less and less time to the school, though I was going there regularly and being in my office regularly and running staff meetings and all of that kind of thing. I didn't have the time that I had had in the beginning for the more personal side of work with students, and I think that the staff felt less unified because of that. I think they became a little bit more self-contained as individuals and didn't really, in the full sense, cooperate. They were more interested in getting the best students in their classes, and this is often the case. I feel as responsible for that as anyone else.

Also, we had quite a division on our board about the future support of the school. One member, who one time was chairman of the board, felt that we should literally hand this school to USC for a dollar a year and let them take it over and take it off of the county support roll. I certainly was not happy with that thought, for two reasons. I felt that USC hadn't particularly distinguished itself in art. They've had a good school of architecture, and they've had a few good students come out of USC as artists, but I don't

think it would have been the college I would have selected anyway, if we had to go the route of selecting a college. This became a real fight which split the board right in half. The Otis Art Institute board supported me in the main, although two or three members were very bitter about the fact that I became a block to accomplishing this. I might say that there were three members of our board who were very closely related to USC: one lady whose husband was on the USC board; the librarian from USC was on the board; and the third person was an architect that did a good deal of the work at USC.

GOODWIN: Why did Otis need a board?

SHEETS: Well, any of the divisions within the county that are run as separate operations, in a sense, must have a lay board appointed by the supervisors. Each of the five board members appointed two people on alternating terms for the Otis board. These people were, of course, then able to check back to their supervisor and keep the supervisor involved, and it was very important that they do that because the supervisors sitting down there found it difficult at times to explain to the lay public why they had to support an art school. Now, if it had been an art school strictly run for artists, I think there would have been a lot of legitimate reasons why people didn't think it should be supported. But we envisaged this school as serving the needs of the county in a very direct way. We did not mean

that every student that graduated had to go out and become a servant of the county. If they had the capacity to become highly creative artists and be utterly independent and live in an ivory tower, we didn't in any way downgrade this thought. But you don't have that many people out of any society that necessarily warrant that kind of freedom. I think that the Board of Supervisors thoroughly understood when we made them rebuild this program, because I spent a great deal of time talking with them, as I did with the then chief administrative officer of the county, Arthur Will, who was an amazing man. I did have full support of the five members of the Board of Supervisors in all the early years of the school.

As the time went on and these splits occurred, particularly as the lady that I mentioned whose husband was on the USC board at that time was probably the most powerful woman in Los Angeles, you could see that we had problems. I left by resigning. I wasn't in any way asked to resign. I left because I just simply couldn't teach anywhere any longer. I had so much work and many necessities for travel for my own business that I just couldn't continue. I stayed six years. The last two years were filled with this frustrating feeling that the school really wasn't being supported as it should be by part of the board of governors, and then in turn, the people they represented on the main board.

I've even heard rumors lately that they are talking about completely removing support to the County Art Institute, which would be the death knell for it. It's hard to conceive, but I've heard this.

GOODWIN: What was the cost to the county while you were director?

SHEETS: Our budget was very small, relatively speaking. I can't remember, off the top of my head. I'm sure I have it. I can get it without any trouble, but it was a low overhead. There was no serious, major amount of money. It would be such an infinitesmal part of the budget that you wouldn't know it was there. But we did have a good staff. We had fine personnel all the way through, from the custodians up.

GOODWIN: Did you introduce the MFA degree or was that already in existence?

SHEETS: I introduced it at Scripps, and we gave the MFA degree at Otis. That was part of the plan: to start at the second year and not give an interim degree, no BA or anything that had to do with a fourth-year degree. We were to go straight through for the four years and then give an MFA, which really meant that the student was equipped. They were masters of their craft and they were able to go out and serve. Right after I left the institute, they immediately changed that and gave the interim degree, which I think is just valueless. Many students take that

and leave, which means they're not even half-baked--they're not trained.

Of course, we had another problem right from the beginning, and that was to get the staff to really get with this problem to the point that they didn't encourage anyone after the first year, or certainly after the second year, if they didn't really feel that the student was of the quality material that should be there. I think if there's any feeling I had about the staff that I selected, it was their inability to really face that issue honestly with their students. They became attached to them, as is normal in any university or high school or college or anyplace else. I think very often their hope that the student would do better than he was doing often misguided them into carrying him on. I felt that the grading was exceedingly high the first year. It came down better the second year. By the third year it seemed to make a little more sense. Many artists, even though they've had some college and other training, are not equipped to really grade as they should. But the more we built those standards up, the better that school became and the more exciting it became. As they started to lower it, it went right back into another level again.

GOODWIN: What should a grade tell a student?

SHEETS: Well, of course you have three systems: you can grade or you can write comments or you can just say "passing"

or "not passing." But I think the grade should tell the student a certain amount. I think that if you follow the present system of grading in most colleges and universities, a B is a better-than-average grade. But I think that in the mind of most Americans, B is the middle grade. Therefore, it's really tough to start out with a C and call it average, and then go down as you think you should. Of course, in my opinion, those students that were getting below Cs shouldn't have been in that school after a year because they didn't belong there.

It was not like a private institution that had to live off of its tuition. Our tuition was extremely low. It since has been raised a great deal. It was very low purposely, and I was able to get considerable amounts of money for scholarships. So we never turned down a good student, ever. I had plenty of people, including myself, that would pay scholarships if we didn't have the money in the scholarship fund. We'd work it out. And I'm very proud of the people that came through in that sense.

But the idea that you can work in an art school for producing people in masses I don't agree with. I think it's impossible. I don't think it's true of anything else, either, but just certainly in the art field. If the students don't learn the fundamental things in the first two years, they have no business to go into the second or the third and fourth year. And this is what I think happened eventually.

GOODWIN: As part of the MFA degree, a student worked on a thesis or major project?

SHEETS: Well, yes. In the final granting of the degree in their fourth year, the students worked primarily on their own projects. They were freed by this time from regular class requirements. They worked with the head instructor in each field. They were almost apprenticed to that person. I don't mean by that that they worked on the professor's work. I don't mean that at all, but they worked very close to them. The professor was expected to give an exceeding amount of time--not just an occasional passing criticism but to really launch the students into major projects that would require a year to complete. The final grades in the projects were given by the top staff members, at the full professor level. We, of course, always had an exhibition of their work at the end of the year. We were graduating at that time, oh, the first year I think it was two, and then eight, and then sixteen. I think we never did get over, while I was there, perhaps twenty graduation students.

GOODWIN: What were some of the typical major projects?

SHEETS: Well, in sculpture I can remember there were projects that had heroic figures done sometimes in a very exciting way. One young man won a Prix de Rome from his master's project. Some member of the committee of the Prix de Rome from New York was passing through and saw his

exhibit and said, "Enter the competition," and he won it. That was a really great feeling on our part. Others worked on big sections of a mural or maybe a group of paintings of a certain subject matter that they wanted to develop a very rounded feeling about. It varied enormously.

Oh, we had a marvelous graphics department, which I didn't mention. We had Ernest Freed, who had been at Iowa, studied with [Mauricio] Lasansky, who was an excellent print man. We had the first really good graphic thing going here. Then UCLA, immediately following that, developed a very strong graphic department for a while. I don't know what they're doing now, but they had a very, very fine department twenty years ago. They brought three or four people out that were doing superb work. Graphics was almost a new thing in Southern California at that time as a real division in the arts, because it required all of the excitement and background of design and drawing and color and all the rest of it. We had big etching presses. We had lithography. They worked in a variety of print media.

GOODWIN: Didn't you also raise ceramics to a new level of importance?

SHEETS: Well, I think we started that at Scripps, definitely. I thought when we brought Peter Voulkos out that we really had hit the jackpot in terms of a ceramic program. In my life I've never seen anything like what Pete Voulkos achieved in the first two years at Otis. It was incredible. He was

at his height, as far as I'm personally concerned, in his own work. His pots were magnificent. He could eat clay. [laughter] He had a great spirit, and the students were crazy about him. Then something happened. Pete became disinterested completely in ceramics as he had practiced it up to that point. He almost rebelled against everything that was skillful. He started just taking house paint and painting his pots if they had a low fire on them. He wasn't interested in the high fire. He just became a completely different kind of artist and immediately turned the department around. It's an unfortunate fact that I had to let him go after another year. The department was simply headed for the rocks. The respect for the medium, for the discipline, for what could be done in fine ceramics just went out the window. And it was tragic. As I understand it now, Pete is turning back towards his original view again. This has been a long interim, fifteen years at least. He's done what he calls sculpture, these enormous, mammoth things for many years now. I'm sorry to say they don't impress me. They're not things that have given me the thrill that he and lots of art critics have felt about them. But I've heard recently from people that know him quite well that he's become vitally interested in reestablishing some of his great technical skill and ability and imagination. I don't think anybody's ever done a pot that's more vital and alive than some of those early pots. They're just magnificent.

But the ceramic department has gone on. It has a very good woman there now, who is formerly a Scripps graduate, as a matter of fact, Whitey [Helen] Watson. She is doing a great job there as the head of the ceramic department. I don't know enough about the other departments. Arthur Ames, I brought in to head the design for many years, until he reached the age of retirement, as did Dick Haines and several others. I don't really know what the new appointments are, but we had a lot of good students and were turning out a lot of exciting things for a period of many years.

GOODWIN: Were you also involved in accelerating the gallery activities at Otis?

SHEETS: Oh, yes. Well, I felt a gallery was absolutely essential to the student body. I felt that we needed a gallery, and we had a very good, well-planned, long-range program where we brought what I think was a balanced diet to the students. The curator for the gallery was Wayne Long. We brought fine old things, great Oriental things, the best we could get in all the fields of art. We had, of course, very exciting contemporary exhibitions. We had a series of brilliant shows over a period of many years. After I left, those were continued for many years.

GOODWIN: Was there a gallery before you came?

SHEETS: No, no. We built the gallery. The only building that was there before I came was one piece of the back

building, just one small part of it, and then all the rest of it we built. The gallery program, I'm sure, is still going. I don't know what the score is today at all. I think it's an important thing for students not only to see fine things and have a chance to see them in and out every day, but also to exhibit their own work so they could get some sense of what it was like to be hung in a gallery. We had great student shows as well as the MFA shows at the end of the year. We always had at least two major shows a year for the students.

GOODWIN: Did the board at Otis provide any funding from the private sector?

SHEETS: Quite a few members of the board gave gifts. It was not a part of the regular budget. The Los Angeles Times, through Mrs. [Norman] Chandler, gave a good deal of money toward the library in the beginning. I think if I remember correctly, it was in the neighborhood of $5,000 a year, which meant a lot to us, in addition to what money we could get from the county. There were other people, private people, and two or three businesses that gave us considerable amounts of money, which we could accept gracefully for special uses: for scholarship, library, or special exhibitions. We needed help quite often. Several of us gave a great deal of help to the exhibitions because they're expensive and it took a lot of time and money.

GOODWIN: Was the Chandler family as actively involved as

it might have been, considering that they're the descendants of the Otis people?

SHEETS: Well, before I accepted the position, I went to see Mrs. Chandler, Mrs. Buff Chandler. I told her exactly what it was that we wanted to do. She had been on the board formerly, as I think her husband had been at one time. But she was not a member of the board, and I asked her first of all what she thought of the program. I must have spent two or three hours with her at her home, in those days in Arcadia. After she showed a real sense of enthusiasm, I said, "Well, I would be willing to go forward with this program, now that the county has asked me to do it, if you would come back on the board." She agreed, and she did. Whoever the supervisor was--I can't remember which particular supervisor appointed her, but he was delighted to do it because they were very happy to have her serve. She was right in the middle of getting the Music Center [of Los Angeles County] going and was right in the center of all the things in Los Angeles. For the first three years, she couldn't have given more wholehearted support than she did. It was when this change of heart came about, about USC, that that support dwindled.

Unfortunately one of the members of the board that I have not mentioned, who also wanted this whole thing changed to USC, was Howard Ahmanson. He was the man I was working for primarily on the outside. He also was a member of the

USC board. I had to go through the agony of telling the four of them I thought they should resign because they made the statement that they didn't feel if anything happened to them or they had to go away from the board that the school would be able to stand on its feet. They did resign before I left, and the school did stand on its feet. I'm very sorry that I couldn't have stayed on to see it stand on its feet permanently.

GOODWIN: Do you think that Otis has a different role today than it had in the past?

SHEETS: Well, I have a strong feeling that when you leave a position, you should not go back and make people feel that you're blowing hot breath on their neck. For this reason, I have not been to Otis. I don't go to Otis. I don't solicit information about what's going on at Otis. I can't help hearing a great many things, and it doesn't seem to me that the program that we started is being carried out at all at the present time. I think it has become more like a typical art school or a typical college art department, where they're interested primarily in teaching taste and teaching contemporary fads in art, rather than saying, "We're going to give you the background, if you have the ability to develop your own concepts and your own styles." This is the way it should be done. But we're talking about probably the most important argument that there is today in the art world: the difference between the ways and ideas

about how you should train an artist. I just don't agree with the present philosophy. I'm afraid that Otis has gone around and isn't any different than most of the departments. I told you that already about Scripps.

GOODWIN: Right. I'm thinking, though, that there are so many more art departments everywhere throughout Southern California. Cal Arts is reorganized and has its own new campus, and the same with Art Center School. I'm wondering whether Otis really has a clear function anymore as long as it continues to do what it has.

SHEETS: I doubt it very much, and I think it will come to a head shortly. I was asked to stay on the board at Otis, which I did for three years at least after I resigned as director. It was during this period that I was on the board that this big mix-up took place about USC. When Mrs. Chandler resigned, her daughter-in-law [Marilyn ("Mitsy") Chandler] was appointed. Well, her background in art is not exactly the deepest. I do not say this in disrespect to her as a person, but I cannot believe that her immature judgment about art and art training should have dominated the changes that have taken place at Otis, but they certainly have. She wanted a very contemporary, very active expressionist, modernist--or whatever ism you wished--to become the director and to switch the school over completely. I think that this is what's happened. They have suffered, really. The people who had been on

the original staff suffered through their final years before they retired, because they were being pushed out in every way. They became unhappy, and certainly the school doesn't reflect any of the original direction. Then after Mitsy Chandler had succeeded in completely destroying the old concepts, she resigned. I think it's very tragic.

GOODWIN: Was there anybody in the county government who was particularly sympathetic to the idea of the county supporting an art school, other than Supervisor Ford? Was there mostly a great deal of hostility?

SHEETS: I never felt that people were at all hostile toward me, but I felt that they questioned very much the idea that the county should be in the business of running an art school. Arthur Will was very much for it. He was a man that had some background. He knew that cities reflect the state of mind of the people, and if you do not train artists, you don't train designers, you don't train creative people, your city isn't going to be creative. It's just inevitable. Through Arthur Will's support and John Anson Ford and some of the other supervisors, not including Kenny Hahn and one or two others who were against anything except their own pet projects, we had some very strong support for many years. Even Mr. Ford's successor [Ernest E. Debs] was very strongly behind us. A list of the members of the board would clearly point out the fact that the board was very

divided. [Warren M.] Dorn was very much for the County Art Institute. The man at Long Beach [Burton W. Chace] who died was very much behind us. I think at first Kenny Hahn was the only one that really picked on the idea. Then that seeped down through.

The civil service people were very interesting to me because I had to spend a great deal of time with them to get them to understand the kind of appointments we had to have. At first they were pretty cursory in their approach to the problem, but as I spent time with them, I found them not only quite sympathetic but I think we had extremely strong support from them. When they understood the level that we were trying to seek, they couldn't attach that to just some little talk about art. The moment it became a matter of how much real background and experience and what the person had been doing with his life in relation to society, they understood that very quickly. I felt, in contrast to many people, that the civil service people were among our strongest supporters.

I used to, of course, go to lunch with the heads of all the county departments every three months at an off-the-record lunch. I enjoyed thoroughly meeting the fifty-two department heads. No supervisors were present. Arthur Will, as chief administrator of the county, was there always and the man that followed him. There was strong respect within the group of department heads for what we

were doing in art. I talked to them many times at their request about our program, and they were really enthusiastic. The decline in support of Otis by the county didn't happen from any pressure, really, from the county. I think it happened just because the board of governors of the institute were lazy and felt that they wanted to dump it onto somebody else's lap.

GOODWIN: I've been trying to compare in my own mind the experience Otis had with county government and the experience that the County Art Museum has had, because I know that in some sense the art museum has been a stepchild of county government, and it just doesn't fit.

SHEETS: It doesn't, and the Otis Art Institute didn't until I started this new program. While that new program was going full blast, there wasn't a problem. As the program seemed to slip away and down into the ordinary kind of a program, then it happened again. I can understand that.

I think you do know that I was on the Cal Arts board when it was organized. Of course, here's a case where the county isn't interfering at all because it was all private money. We didn't talk about this before, did we?

GOODWIN: No.

SHEETS: Tragically, Walt Disney died at exactly the wrong moment. Of course it's wrong for anyone to die, I suppose, at any moment. But as far as the school was concerned, he

had built up so much feeling about this school and had given so much attention to it and had stimulated a lot of his friends into believing in this thing, and he died. On the first board, there were only one or two of us that really had any sense of what an art school was about. The rest of the people were nice people, very good people. Some of them had been involved with motion pictures, financing motion pictures. Others were technically involved with motion pictures. Others were very serious, public-minded, public-spirited people. But an art school, that's something else.

Walt's brother [Roy Disney] was an amazing man. He had the most marvelous spirit, particularly toward Walt. The whole thing had been as much his doing as Walt's, really, the Walt Disney Studio. But the older brother felt that he didn't ever want a kind of a Warner Brothers title to the organization, so it was always called the Walt Disney Studios. But Walt could never have done the job of creating the tremendous studio that he did had it not been for his brother. So when Walt died so suddenly, and as his brother was ten years older, he became somewhat frightened at the idea that something might happen to him before this dream of Walt's was realized. So the building was pushed through far too rapidly. It had been planned and discussed by an architect and by Walt for years, but then there was no one there to really curb the architect.

Suddenly the plans became infinitely more important than the program or the kinds of students they were going to have.

The tragedy, as I look at it, is that here was a great idea, with a tremendous financial backing, that just had to have a birth not as a normal six- to nine-pound child, but as an 800-student-body, full-grown institution. The entire act of finding staff, searching for heads of departments--and the whole thing was done without real regard to clear objectives of what Walt had envisaged, which was a very simple idea. He said, "As a man that's been involved with motion pictures, which is a great media, where all of the arts are used, where we have music, writers, cinematographers, cameramen, and all the different crafts, I know, obviously, that we can hire experts, but they're experts who don't know anything about the other experts and what they're really trying to accomplish. Even the director doesn't always know how to pull these things together." The way he described it was, "If we had a school where we would set the level right at the top and wouldn't let anyone in that didn't have some real ability, where we had schools of music, of drama, of cinematography, of dance, and of the graphic and applied arts, all under one roof, as the students walk from one class to another, passing art exhibits of students and others, they're hearing music, and they're living in the dormitories with people that

are in all the arts." The way he put it was, "Who knows what kind of a form will eventually come out of such an experience in the creation of a whole new concept of cinematography and the motion picture as we know it today?"

Well, that was his dream. Though I said it and a few other people who knew Walt said it very strongly, over and over again, that's a hard thing for people that don't understand to really comprehend the importance of. So the first thing they did was to find a man who was very excellent in the field of drama and who had had a lot of college and university administrative ability and experience, and they hired him. Then he listened real hard to each of the people that he wanted to hire in the various fields, and there was absolutely no unity to the concept at all. On top of that, he hired a dean that just put a ring in the director's nose and jerked him at will all over the place. The school got off to such a bad start that it almost blew up in the second year, after spending over $20 million. Another terrible tragedy was that the board sat there and voted to spend about $17 million of the $20 million for capital expenditure, which made no sense at all. It did build buildings that could house 800 people, but it didn't provide most of the vital things: endowment for the staff, endowment for the program, to assure it in any sense. It's been a pickup game ever since. Even though the family has put another $20 million in, it still needs a great deal of

money for scholarships, for staff, and for all the other things that are involved in running a big institution.

Now, if they had started out in a totally different way, if they had started out with, say, two or three disciplines, maybe an art school and perhaps a music school or maybe one more, and built a part of a master plan, and had perhaps twenty-five absolutely top students, the most brilliant young people they could find, of any age--I don't give a damn how old they are--and start a school on quality, and then in another three years or four years added another area, and had grown like that--the money would have been there drawing a tremendous income--they could have had a school of strength. It's a tragedy to see people hiring people to run any department who don't really know what it is that that department is supposed to do.

I finally resigned from the board less than a year ago. I spent, altogether, about eight years, some of those years discussing the school with Walt Disney and with other people. Long before he even wanted to have a board formed, we spent a tremendous amount of time talking about this project. It was very clear in his mind and certainly in my mind what he had wanted to create. I saw them about to hire a man to head the art department as bad as the one who had been there before, and it became almost a confrontation problem, again, between myself and the director, who I have a great deal of admiration for. I think he's a very bright man,

but I don't think anyone else I've ever met can know all there is to know about music and cinematography and drama and the graphic and applied arts and the dance. There's so much theory mixed into all of it. I interviewed one of the prospective appointees for head of the art department, and I thought he was not only a charming man but that he had a tremendous amount of feeling about art, so it wasn't a personal distaste for him on my part. But when I asked him some very simple questions about how he felt a department should be organized, what he felt were the basic requirements to insure a proper end product, it was the same old laissez-faire attitude: bring them in here; let them get around the people; it will all work out. And it doesn't work out. I think if Walt were alive today, he would be shocked as hell at what the institute is doing.

Now, I think this is not as true, certainly, in music. I have a very strong feeling that music is being well taught there. I think the drama department, after many difficult starts and stops, is moving forward very strongly. The dance has always been good. They've had excellent people. But now you're talking about disciplines where there's no bull involved. If you can't dance, if you can't handle your feet and your body, you aren't going to function.

GOODWIN: There's a built-in discipline.

SHEETS: It's just a built-in discipline. Certainly in music, unless you know something about your instrument

and the structure of music--sure, some people read by ear, but it's hardly what you build a school around. In art it just seems to be the most frustrating thing in the world to me that anyone who feels they've spent enough time in the vicinity of art are automatically experts who know everything that needs to be known about how you train people to find out who they are. You can't find out who you are until you have enough discipline back of you. The fear of discipline now is frightening to me as the philosophy upon which to build an art school.

These are strange days where education can be so involved in plain theory and not really excited about where this guy's going, where's that gal going, what's she going to do when she gets out of here? They don't seem to care. I can't believe that that's education.

GOODWIN: You mentioned on one occasion that you're now a board member of the Art Center School.

SHEETS: Yes, I've just become a board member. I haven't had my first board meeting yet.

GOODWIN: Oh. So you can't compare the experience there to Cal Arts?

SHEETS: No, except by observation and by knowing members of the board. I think Art Center could easily fall into this pattern because the pressure is there from students, though not as much as it was a few years back. But many students today would rather be very clever and look very

contemporary and look very much with-it than to feel that they want to get down to the gristle and bone and find out about something. But I think the tendency of the faculty is, as I've watched it over the forty years of fifty years I've been involved, that as an artist matures and develops a great deal more taste, a great deal more knowledge of art, a great deal more feeling about art, if they've grown and continue to grow, it's very hard for them to want to go back and teach the fundamentals. They're bored by it. They feel like that is stepping backwards to them. So they begin to twist the drawings or the paintings, whatever it is, into the kind of formula that they're interested in. The kind of taste that they have, they like to impose upon students. Now, that's a dreadful mistake, in my opinion because I don't think anybody is so omnipotent that they should impose their taste on their students. Basically what's wrong is it doesn't give a student the full set of tools from which he can operate with his particular quality of mind and particular kind of perception and insight and then fully express himself. Students that I've known over the years, whether they were in my class or anyone else's classes, who really learned to understand structure and other qualities, I don't have to be worried about. If they have any art in them, it's going to come out. You can't impose art, except superficially. About the time they get out of school they begin to get a little

bit sick of art. After a couple of years of frustration and no chance to move ahead, they drop it. And that's wrong. That's absolutely wrong.

GOODWIN: Does a good art teacher necessarily have to be a prominent artist?

SHEETS: Not necessarily. I think that I've known art teachers who are extraordinary teachers, but I don't think they're theoreticians. I don't think they're people who have just studied and looked at art history. I'm speaking now on the applied side, strictly. I mean there's a complete world of art history and philosophy, which you have your degree in. I don't have to explain that to you. There's no quarrel between what you have had as a background and what I'm talking about.

GOODWIN: Right, I understand that.

SHEETS: I'm talking about a young person who says, "I would like to be a practicing artist in my lifetime." Now, I know teachers--I've had some. I think Herbert Jepson was one of the best examples that I know. Herbert kept avoiding painting and kept avoiding making even exciting drawings, which he had obviously the ability to do. But he became so involved with teaching that he did not become a distinguished artist in his own right. But as a teacher, I think he was one of the most effective I've known. He taught what he knew, and he knew it well, and he taught it with a great deal of taste. Now, you can't ask more

from anyone than that. I think drawing should be taught with good taste. But if you're trying to push taste out beyond knowing how, that's bad. He didn't do that. He taught damn well. I've known painters who can teach good, solid, basic discipline that frees a person. But it's just too bad that we have to have so many aesthetes running around, all over hell, trying to teach the basic disciplines.

GOODWIN: Well, do you think far too many art professors are bored being professors, and they only teach as a means to an end?

SHEETS: I think they teach it partly as an escape, because they can't make it on the front line. I think that what you said is also true. I think that they are bored with the idea that they have to do it to make a living. They probably should thank their stars--although I don't think it's good for society--that they have a job because they couldn't make it otherwise, and that's what's wrong. Why should people teach who can't produce? Now, I don't mean that an artist necessarily has to work outside professionally if he's a fine teacher. There's a tremendous need for a teacher, and great teachers. I think it's just as important to be a great teacher certainly as it is to be anything else--and maybe more important in many ways because you can touch more lives. But I don't think they should expect to teach if they can't perform themselves. This is what I'm talking about. This is what's happening.

And, even at Art Center, I gather from talking to some of the old staff members over there that I have known for thirty-five and forty years--they're very concerned about this very thing that's happening to a degree in Art Center. Now, it hasn't happened in Art Center in the same way because Art Center is so thoroughly oriented to going right into commercial design and into industrial design that there's not much chance for nonsense. But if some of the teachers are going to teach less thoroughly by becoming a little more concerned only with the aesthetic, then it irritates the hell out of some of these people that really know what they're doing. That's happening because a lot of those people of this generation that are teaching have never had that serious kind of training.

GOODWIN: Does Art Center represent the opposite extreme, compared to a school like Otis today, in that it overemphasizes the commercial viewpoint and doesn't necessarily emphasize fundamentals.

SHEETS: Well, I think Art Center does emphasize fundamentals of technical disciplines. I think that they are stressing, a little more all the time, aesthetic understanding, and certainly design understanding, which is highly important. It is the design that is the aesthetic side. But right now when a student or a family having a young student comes to me and asks, "Where shall I go?" or "Where shall I send my child?" I'm almost forced to

suggest Art Center today. I have to make it clear that though it's certainly oriented definitely to the commercial and the industrial, at least you get some basic training there, which I can't tell you you're going to get over here or over here or over here. That's a lousy compromise. It shouldn't have to be that way.

GOODWIN: Let's end this sequence on an upbeat note. How do you possibly teach artists imagination, divorced from technical skill?

SHEETS: No, I don't think you can teach imagination. I think that you can point out very clearly that the artists of the world who amount to anything and who've lived through the various periods of art and who continue to be important are loaded with feeling and imagination. That's the reason that their work lasts. It isn't because they have only the technical skills. Real imagination is freed, if you study the history of art, by the most disciplined process of learning how to observe and to perceive. The more one studies the facts of life and the realities of structure and the unbelievable nuances of color in life in every aspect, the more your imagination has a chance to grow and to blossom. You cannot conjure up what you haven't experienced. There's no way, in my opinion. The more you dig into a subject, the more you begin to let your mind go and fly. It's the most wonderful thing to me to watch, as I have watched so many young people, who have gone through

what looks like these disciplines, and suddenly they're moving way out into space over there because this direction made it possible for them to do that, this direction of digging into the facts. You can't teach people to paint imaginatively if they can't paint. You can say, "You mustn't think that after you've painted every eyelash on the butterfly and petal on the blossom, that that's the answer. If you can do that, then maybe you can do something, if you have any ideas. Or if you've got some feeling or if you have some imagination, you can express it." I mean, that's the way it has to be put to them, because that's the way it ends up being. People in art who have had great imagination are people who weren't ever stopped for one minute because they didn't know how to paint or draw or design. They're people who were masters of their craft, and that's why their imagination can soar.

[tape recorder turned off]

GOODWIN: We're going to discuss mural painting now. If I remember correctly, your first exposure was as a student with Tolles Chamberlain at Chouinard.

SHEETS: Right. I didn't even know what the word mural meant. I didn't know it was as simple as a thing like a wall. But when Tolles Chamberlain stimulated the interest of several of us in the murals of the past, we began to experiment. We had an old back wall where we painted pretty bad attempts toward mural painting right there in

the school. Then a series of things just seemed to open up. I was given a chance to do some very large panels in a new beach club down south of Long Beach--I guess it's Seal Beach now. I was very excited and talked Phil Dike into helping me with these murals, and we did about ten panels. I guess it was really one of the first jobs, although I'd done one, I think, in the YMCA in Pasadena before that and two or three other small murals. This was the first thing that was, in a real public sense, a mural commission. We worked in oil on canvas because that was about the only thing we knew in those days.

Then, just after the crash of '29--I had come back from Europe and I was happily married at that point, 1930--I was given a very large commission to do some murals for the Hollywood Savings and Loan. That was a savings and loan that was part of the great Beesmeyer group. The Hollywood Bank, the Hollywood Savings and Loan, and several other big financial institutions were part of a big combine. As laws have been passed since that time, it would be impossible to have such failure. I worked very hard on those murals and hired three or four men to work with me, because there was a time problem involved and the panels were large. It was the whole history of the motion picture, which of course was in its infancy to a degree in those days. But we painted them as they were then. The week before I finished the murals, the crash really came, and

not only was the Hollywood Savings and Loan unable to pay my bill, which was about 80 percent of the whole contract--and I'd been paying labor out for months with what little I could get together in those days--but my bank account was in the Hollywood Bank. What little money I had in the Hollywood Bank was frozen, all the same day. If you don't think that was a dark Friday . . . . But, in any case, I owned the murals, and they were pretty valueless to me. I remember to this day that two of the fellows that worked for me sued me for the last $200 apiece that they had coming. And they knew that I didn't have the $200, not having been paid for the job. Long before it ever went to court, I borrowed the money and paid them off, but I thought it was a really strange thing when they knew the whole circumstance.

Then I had a chance to do three big frescoes in the South Pasadena Junior High School. It was the most beautiful new school, designed by Powell and Powell. The principal of that high school (Derwood Baker) was an extremely forward-looking person and knew something about me and something about the fact that I'd painted some murals. He decided he would like to raise the money privately to paint two frescoes in a courtyard. I had done this work with Siqueiros that I mentioned earlier and had done a few small frescoes. But I worked practically every night for a whole year, with one assistant. We did

our own plastering, and we did these two big panels. We did one on agriculture; we did one on industry. They're all figurative and very large. It was probably technically one of the best things I ever did in my life. They were true fresco, true Italian fresco--all transparent, no white except the white in the plaster. We'd had a very exciting time doing them, and I think the students were tremendously excited and moved by these murals because they saw them actually emerge slowly. Every night they saw a little bit more. As you know, in frescoes when you paint, you have to plaster the wall with a very dry plaster, and you can work on it up to a certain point, the point when it oxidizes; then it will no longer receive water or the pigment, and you're through. If you aren't through, you have to scratch off what you've done. Well, we had quite a few bad evenings during the rainy season, although we had it covered well enough with canvases and so forth. We could keep fairly warm, but it was a pretty cool experience working out there night after night. We'd start right after a normal day's work and work until midnight or two in the morning for almost a year.

The saddest thing happened after that. They were so well received, and the students and everybody liked them. They were well known at that time--we're talking about 1930 and '31, because it was before I went to Scripps. I mentioned to the head custodian of the school, a

marvelous elderly man, that there was a way of water-proofing fresco if it did get a tremendous amount of water on it. I had read about it, but I had never tried it. He was worried about the elements, whether the rain and so forth would do it damage over a period of time. It was on the north wall, and it was enclosed in a court, and though there wasn't much of an overhang, I don't really think anything would have really eventually hurt them. But I had read in a very proper book that if you took pure castile soap and made a certain solution--practically non-existent as far as soap was concerned; it's just like 1:500 or 1:1000--if that's painted on the mural, that that produced a permanent waterproofing process without in any way touching the color, or hurting it, or making it in any way other than the way it was. But I said that's something we should consider maybe five years from now, if there's any sense of this thing happening.

Well, without ever discussing it with the principal or with me, and with the best of intentions, he destroyed the murals. He mixed a very heavy solution that must have looked like poster paint when he put it on, and it completely destroyed the murals. It looked like someone had been pouring milk on them for months. The color was destroyed. You'd get certain images through, but it was absolutely beyond belief. I didn't know this. I never heard a thing about it. The principal changed, and he unfortunately didn't

call me. Because if he'd called me, I don't know whether there was anything we could have done, but there might have been something we could have done. But he didn't call me. Some general custodian of all the buildings decided the thing was just to paint over them, so they painted over them with cement paint, and I didn't know that for fifteen years. It was fifteen years later that they called me back and asked if there was any way of removing this cement.

Well, we had two experts dig into it, and we found that even though we could remove the cement probably with a great deal of cost, by picking at it with a small scalpel for months, that the thing had been so destroyed underneath that there was no value in it. That was a real disappointment, and the terrible thing is that I only have two very poor little black-and-white photographs of these things even as a matter of record. That was a sad experience, and I never had any other like that.

After that experience I started painting murals in various banks. When the big fair [Golden Gate Exposition, 1940] was held in San Francisco, just before the war started, I did something like 20,000 square feet of murals for four different projects. One major job was for the exposition itself. I did six enormous panels, with big arches at the top, sort of a history of San Francisco idea. Then I did two jobs, one for the L.A. Chamber of Commerce, a huge mural; I think it was 100 feet long and 30 feet high.

It went around a half of a circle in a building, in a huge room. I can't even remember all of the ones we did because most of those were taken down after the exposition. Though they are placed somewhere, I don't know where they are. They were all on canvas and mounted so they could be removed.

But that's when I really discovered the problem of managing a lot of people who were helping me and running into labor problems for the first time. I got up there to hang them, and they wouldn't let us touch them. We had to go through the labor unions in San Francisco, which were very tough compared to anything down here in those days. That's now reached here, so we're getting into the same thing all over. But it was a great experience because there was about two-and-a-half years' work where I was deeply involved with every facet of planning, designing, executing, business relations, labor union relations, and then physically getting everything up. It was a good experience.

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GOODWIN: Diego Rivera was working for the San Francisco exposition.

SHEETS: Yes, he did the big job at the stock exchange, and also he did a beautiful panel at the San Francisco Art Institute. Have you ever seen that?

GOODWIN: Yes, it's thrilling.

SHEETS: That's a beautiful painting. That was at his best period, that and the things earlier, the ones I told you about (or we discussed at least), the Palace of Education in Mexico, which very few people see. It's the most extensive job he ever did, except that final one in the main palace [Palacio Nacional], but that became more illustrative. In the Palace of Education, there must be four major courts and at least twenty panels in each court. They're probably twenty-five feet high and ten or twelve feet wide. They're magnificent. They're the most brilliant things in color I've ever seen him do and extremely beautiful fresco technique all the way through. He's an amazing artist. The last things don't reflect that at all. But the fact that the Mexicans did come up here and Orozco came up and did Prometheus at Pomona College gave a boost to the whole idea of painting murals. And of course the PWA project during the Depression was of great importance.

We haven't discussed that, have we?

GOODWIN: No.

SHEETS: Well, I was on the committee in charge of the PWA project in Southern California, and that was a great experience for me. I was young, but I was asked by Edward Bruce in Washington, who was a painter that I had known; along with Merle Armitage, who was the chairman; and Dal Hatfield, who was my dealer. But that isn't the reason I was asked to serve. Bruce knew all of us, and he knew that we knew the artists, so originally there were three of us. We received wires one morning. It was on a Friday. We were to put 100 artists to work by Monday night. Well, of course that couldn't be done, but it was a very exciting thing. The three of us met, and we added two more people to our committee, and we really went to work combing the names of all of the artists who we knew that were operating in Southern California who had both the capacity to do things of importance and who also probably needed help. It took us about a week, but we did get seventy-five or eighty artists working within a week.

We had some of the most distinguished names in American painting. Many who were living here then moved away, of course, and lived in other parts of the country. There were some very distinguished guys and gals. Lorser Feitelson and his present wife [Helen Lundeberg] were on the project. We had at least thirty artists that were competent mural painters.

So the first thing we did was to sit down with the artists individually, and we offered them many opportunities. We were running like mad in every direction. We were going to schools, we were going to various public buildings, and asking if they would be willing to have a mural painted, if we did it through this project. And of course a lot of them didn't even know what a mural was, and it took a long time to correlate the ability that these artists had with the possibilities. But eventually we had things in practically all the public buildings here, done by very distinguished people.

Many of these things are still up and are very attractive. A lot of them have been removed because the buildings have been torn down or for other reasons. But it was a vital, wonderful program. It lasted about two and a half years. During that time we had people, of course, doing graphics; they were painting; there was lots of sculpture. We did tremendous numbers of big sculpture projects in parks, and a lot of the things that are sprinkled all around Southern California were done during that time, as far away as San Diego and as far north as Santa Barbara, and all over this part of the country.

GOODWIN: Were there many artists who were excluded because they weren't good enough?

SHEETS: The only competent artists that were excluded were those that didn't need help. The PWA project was

designed to really assist people who needed financial help during that period. Many of the artists had had a very decent income, a very decent job in some instances, and a lot of those things disappeared. They really were having a hard time to support a family.

GOODWIN: What kind of payment did the artists receive?

SHEETS: Well, I'd have to look that up. It was adequate, but it was certainly not extravagant. It would be probably not unlike what Russia pays its artists in relation to their society--maybe not as good, because in Russia today, an artist, once he or she is approved in the city, has an income which is probably close to about $500, which is a lot of money in Russia, or was when I was there sixteen years ago. I don't know whether it is today. I think that these artists received in the neighborhood of $500 or $400 a month, which in those days was a great deal of money. It was adequate. They were given money for materials, and we bought the materials, I think, largely through the project, the canvas and the oils or whatever the materials were for whatever mural or sculptural project. But there must have been at least 150 major projects executed during that time.

GOODWIN: Did you do any of them?

SHEETS: No. No. I worked the whole time trying to get places to paint, and then we met with the artists at least three mornings a week, which took a tremendous amount of my personal time.

GOODWIN: Where was the program headquartered?

SHEETS: We rented a vacant building on Seventh Street, not too far from Lafayette Park. We had a good-sized office there and enough storage space so we could store a lot of material and store a lot of the paintings. As the paintings would come in, we'd distribute them to schools and to various public buildings. Whereas I never received any money for working for the project--we were not paid as administrators at all--I did do a couple of large lithographs, colored lithographs, which I gave. We printed like 500 each, and I keep running into these things at schools and places. They were done way back in the thirties. I was able to get quite a few artists to give some very important things, sometimes an actual painting, sometimes a piece of sculpture. All of us who didn't have to have that income--and I don't mean to suggest that I had any money; I was pretty broke in the Depression. We were having babies, but we had an adequate amount to live on. I took time away from Scripps and, in the early days, Chouinard to do this work, but it was a great experience.

GOODWIN: Was there a neighborhood where artists tended to live in those days, or were they spread out?

SHEETS: Los Angeles has always been too spread out. There was quite a group around [Stanton] MacDonald-Wright, who worked up in the North Broadway area. There were a lot of studios where all the Civic Center now is. There was a

bunch of old, interesting buildings, and many artists lived in that area, and they had studios there. MacDonald-Wright had classes up on Broadway in a building. There were dance studios up there, and I mean real dance studios, not just where some guy goes to dance. There were little smatterings here and there in Hollywood. There were a few up around, oh, let's see, that park between Sunset and Temple, Echo Park, near the old Aimee Semple McPherson temple [Angelus Temple Church of the Foursquare Gospel]. There were quite a lot of artists that lived right around in there. But there wasn't really a center like New York. The city's so spread out.

GOODWIN: It sounds, though, that there was a greater feeling of camaraderie then than today?

SHEETS: The PWA project during the Depression certainly did create a lot of opportunity for artists to meet. About the only other things that brought artists together were the old California Art Club and the old California Watercolor Society. The California Art Club was more of a social club than anything else, although they did have an exhibit every year. The Watercolor Society didn't have social meetings, but they were a good society, very young, and there weren't many members. I am one of the very early members of that, and the older people in it were very good watercolor painters, like Vysekal and a whole group that had started it. It was a nice group, a national society.

But the PWA gave all the artists an opportunity, who probably wouldn't have seen each other and had much to do with one another, a chance to get together. Fletcher Martin is the man I was trying to think of who did some very important things in the federal building or state building, I've forgotten which. I think it was the federal building.

Leo Katz was an artist who was living here who had been very famous in New York. He's since died. Of course, he was in his sixties then. He was a very strong, almost heroic, painter and lithographer. He did a couple of big murals.

One of the most modern of all of the painters in New York, one of the most exciting contemporary painters, was in this group. There were four or five of them that worked as a team, and he was one of those. I can't think of his name.

There were problems, too, because a few of the artists wanted to be political. There's no question but what in every group you get a few that are more concerned about the political side of their expression than about the other sides, the mural side or the decorative side. We ran into that as a real problem because within the government, back in Washington, we were told very strongly that this could not be a vehicle for real communism or any other kind of specialism. If an artist was a Communist, that wasn't any reason we shouldn't put him on the payroll, but he wasn't

to paint communistic murals. Well, we had a few almost knock-down-drag-outs with two or three--only two or three--but it got pretty rough one time.

I remember we had one fellow who had a great deal of ability, but he was obnoxious as hell. He hated everybody--not just the committee, he hated other artists. He didn't think anybody else was an artist. I remember this great guy, Merle Armitage, who wore no man's collar. He was a very independent cuss himself and patient up to a point. We had, I think, three meetings with this fellow and he kept being more and more obnoxious. He developed a little more of that each time. Finally he came in the third time, and Merle had said this was the last time we were going to reason with him. The fellow started a tirade all over again about the fact that he thought he should be allowed to do any damn thing he wanted to do. Merle said, "Well, my friend, I'll tell you, when there's a cancer you get a knife and you cut it out." He said, "You've just been amputated." It was really funny the way he did it at that time. It probably wouldn't seem as funny now. He really meant it, and the artist was amputated. But basically they were marvelous.

Some teams came out of the project that were quite interesting, people that hadn't known too much about each other. One of the greatest guys, of course, without any question, was Lorser Feitelson, because he had been a

teacher long enough and he had been an artist long enough. He'd painted all over Europe. He knew his way around, and he was not afraid to try anything. He took on, happily, several young people, young artists who hadn't been out of art school too long. Without really dictating to them, he put them under his wing and helped a lot of them learn a hell of a lot. He literally was teaching while they were working. They were not married at that time, but his wife, Helen Lundeberg, who paints under her own name, of course, was doing some perfectly beautiful projects of her own. Jean and Arthur Ames did a fabulous couple of mosaics down at Newport Beach. They were extremely competent, and they worked so well and so beautifully together. Later, when Jean came to teach for me at Scripps, they decided to get married in order to move to Claremont. But there were a lot of interesting teams that came out of that whole period, people who hadn't worked together before, and I think it was a very good thing. I don't think all the art that came out of it was great, but I think it was a marvelous, timely thing. It was certainly better for an artist than to go work on a road project or something else, which so many people were doing at the same time.

It's hard for you to really visualize at your age what the Depression was like. It was a discouraging period to most people. They didn't know where to turn. I think the start with this project was so fast due to Edward Bruce,

who was a great friend of the president. He was a famous lawyer and a very good artist in his own right. You probably don't know his work because he wasn't known out here very much. But Edward Bruce was a very competent painter, and he was very close to Roosevelt. He persuaded Roosevelt and the then-head of the Treasury Department that this was a good idea. He just reached out and tapped all of his friends all over the country to set up these different organizations, and almost overnight they did--I don't know how many centers, at least eight or ten, maybe more. When you think of starting to paint murals all within about a month, right on walls, it was quite an undertaking. We had very limited means, but I think it was great. Out of it came a lot of good painters, all over the United States, not certainly just here--painters that I know very well, that I've known all my life, that I didn't know worked on that project. Henry Varnum Poor and, gosh, I can't even begin to tell you the people. It was a marvelous period.

GOODWIN: What was the next step in your mural painting?

SHEETS: Well, I think it grew out of the Home Savings development, because it was the first time that I'd ever had an opportunity to be so deeply involved with the combination of the mural and the building. Just as an aside, I think that probably in the history of our country, there's never been an equal opportunity for any other artist than what I've had in this Home Savings relationship.

It's a commercial enterprise, obviously a free enterprise, designed to make a profit. Due to the fluke of a peculiar relationship between [Howard] Ahmanson and myself, we started the first buildings.

I had never even heard of Mr. Ahmanson, and one day in the mail I received a letter. It was written almost like a telegram. It said: "Dear Sheets. Saw photograph building you designed, L.A. Times. Liked it. I have two valuable properties, Wilshire Boulevard, need buildings. Have driven Wilshire Boulevard twenty-six years, know year every building built, names of most architects, bored. If interested in doing a building that will look good thirty-five or forty years from now when I'm not here, call me." That was the most amazing letter I ever received. Well, I called him, and I could tell you some delightful stories about the first meeting.

GOODWIN: Go ahead.

SHEETS: Well, I called him up and said, "This is Mr. Sheets calling." He just said, "Interested?" I said, "Well, it certainly sounds interesting." "Do you ever get hungry?" "Well, yes, normally, about noon." "Lunch tomorrow?" I said, "Great." He said, "My address is so-and-so and so-and-so," and he hung up.

Well, I didn't know what the hell I was getting into, but I went to this place down on South Spring Street. I parked next to the number of the building he gave me. He

said it was top floor. I went upstairs in the most rickety elevator I have ever been on. I wasn't sure I was going to get to the top, but I got there and stepped right out into the worst sweatshop I have ever seen in my life. I've seen in the garment areas things that look so much better, where, at least, there was space for a human being to move. This was a sea of desks and confusion like I've never seen in my life and the most miserable lighting. Eventually a lady came over and asked me if I was Mr. Sheets. I said yes, being the only foreign-looking person in the place. She said, "Follow me." Well, following her meant weaving through a bunch of desks, turning sideways (and I was skinny in those days), and slithering along, and eventually getting around through a kind of figure-8 pattern to a door into an office, which she opened, and I went in.

I saw a man sitting in his shirtsleeves, his feet up on his desk, with a telephone, and he just nodded to a so-called sofa. Well, in my life I have never sat on a sofa like this. It was the old-fashioned kind that had loose springs that hadn't been tied. The least you'd get is a good goose out of one. I sat down, and I hit bottom instantly. The room was covered with plaster that had been so long up there that there were holes in it. It was a sherbet green of natural-colored plaster which had not been painted. The lighting in the room was ghastly, and the drapes were terrible. The desk had a hole in it

where his feet had been. I thought, what kind of a gooney bird have I gotten myself with here? What is this, anyway?

In addition to that, he sat there and talked for thirty minutes. He had never more than acknowledged the fact that I arrived. I sat there, and I didn't know whether or not to get up and leave, but this conversation went on and on and on. It seemed to be very involved with business, and it didn't make any difference to him that I was waiting. Finally he hung up suddenly and stood up, reached back on an old coatrack, pulled his coat off, and put it on, and said, "Let's go." He didn't even say hi. Now we've got to go through the figure-8 again, and we go through all that same mess. We go back on the same elevator, down to the bottom. I don't know where we're going, I suppose some little joint on Spring Street. We walk around to the same parking lot where I parked, and here's the most beautiful, big, overgrown Cadillac I've ever seen, with a nice, colored chauffeur. We get in the back seat, and he started out towards Beverly Hills.

I still don't know where we're going--he didn't say--but we started a conversation that was so exciting. He never discussed anything about the buildings at any time and I certainly didn't. He didn't discuss anything about the fact that I was an artist or why I was with him. We just started on subjects that became more and more interesting during the entire afternoon. We had a beautiful

lunch at the Beverly Hills Club. A lot of his friends came by. I was introduced to them, they'd walk away afterwards, and the conversation would go right back to where it was. Neither of us knew that we'd reached five o'clock. I suddenly looked at my watch, and I had had a three o'clock appointment and nearly fainted. I knew this was a real job [laughter] and I couldn't care about that appointment. Oh, I nearly died. I said, "Mr. Ahmanson, I'm terribly sorry but I've got to go. I've got to get to a telephone immediately." Well, of course, the people I was to meet had gone; they weren't in their office after five o'clock. So he said, "Well, I missed one, too. I was supposed to be someplace at three-thirty." With that we go out and get in his car, and we're driving down Wilshire Boulevard, coming east towards Los Angeles from Beverly. As we go by a certain block, without even looking, he just takes his finger and he says, "That's one of them." Then we go on clear down this side of Western Avenue and, "That's another one." That's all he said.

We got down to the parking lot, and all this time there's never been one word about a building. I want to tell you it was one of the most exciting afternoons I've ever had. We talked about everything. I couldn't tell you now what we talked about, but I know it was like hundreds of conversations I had with Howard after that. He was one of the best-read men I've ever known. He read

every night until two or three in the morning. He couldn't sleep, and he just read. He was a very exciting guy, if you had him alone. In a crowd, he became a totally different human being. He became more pompous, and he became a little more braggadocio about his success and so forth. There wasn't an inkling of that in this original conversation.

We got into the parking lot, and he said, "Your car here?" I said, "Yes, it's right there." He said, "Do you think you could put up with me?" I said, "Well, I don't know what you mean." He said, "Well, do you think you could put up with me to do a building or two?" I said, "I sure can. It doesn't seem to me like it would be very difficult because you've put up with me." He said, "All right, that settles it. I want you to understand something now: I don't want you to telephone me ever. I do not wish to discuss these buildings with you. I'm going to let you do one, and if it's right then we'll do the other one." I said, "Well, Mr. Ahmanson, we've got to discuss budgets. I haven't even discussed fees." He said, "You'll be fair with me, and I'll be fair with you. The budget--that's up to what you build. You build it like you were building it for yourself." I said, "I can't take that responsibility; no way I can do that." He said, "Well, then you're not going to do the job." I said, "I don't even know anything about the function. I don't even know what kind of a building it is." He said, "I have plenty of people who

can give you that information, but now listen, don't you let them tell you how to design this building. If you want to know how many bodies there have to be in the room and what they do, fine. But don't you talk design to anyone. I want nobody connected with it. I haven't got a guy in my organization that knows anything about this. And I don't. And I want it done the way you would do it if you were doing it for yourself."

"Well," I said, "I've got to think about that." Really, I almost shook all the way driving back to Claremont. It was so utterly unusual. I'd done several buildings for commercial people, and we'd always set budgets. I'd studied the problems and presented the solutions, and then we discussed whether we could do what they wanted within the budget. Well, none of that with him, no way.

I finally called him one day, and I said, "Now, I have three different solutions, just as preliminary ideas for this building. Would you be willing to look at these three and even say you had a preference?" He said, "Well, okay, okay." I took three sketches in of this first building, and I set them down on this god-awful floor in this god-awful office, and he looked at them. He walked up and down the room for forty minutes, and he never said a word, not one word. There wasn't a frown or a smile. He just absolutely walked up and down. Finally, he went over, and he picked up the telephone, and he called his wife. He

said, "I'm looking at the goddamnedest building." He said, "It's just going to be great." He wouldn't tell me--he told her. He said, "I can't wait for you to see it. It's going to be just exactly what I wanted." He went on and on and on, and he talked to her for forty minutes. Well, it was pleasant, but it was a little embarrassing, too. Finally he said, "Well, could I borrow that sketch tonight, and I'll get it back to you tomorrow?" [laughter] I said, "Which one?" He said, "That one." He never hesitated over what he wanted, and he took it home. He sent it out special delivery the next day to Claremont, sent a guy out with it, and with instructions that I was to talk to so-and-so for my information.

I went in and talked to this fellow [Kenneth Childs] four or five times and did get a lot of information. I found out it was an insurance company and a few other things, and I went ahead with it. When it was ready to let the contract, I called this same guy and I said, "Well, the building is all set, and the contract is ready to go." He said, "Fire." I said, "Well, don't you want to know anything about it?" He said, "It wouldn't make any difference to me. It's what the boss wants."

So we built the building. I got down to the middle of construction, and on my sketch I had suggested some sculpture and one mosaic and so forth. By this time I knew I wanted a certain man to do the sculpture, and I

was going to do the mosaic, but there were some other things involved, too. I had a budget for what the art was going to cost. Of course up to this time I always thought of art being completely separate, outside the regular budget, as it always was presented to me by any architect and by any client I'd ever dealt with. So I called him up. He finally answered the phone, and I said, "Mr. Ahmanson, I know that you've asked me not to bother you, but I have a really vital decision that I think you are the only one to make. If you remember on that little sketch that you saw, I just indicated sculpture and so forth. I have now all the costs on the entire art part of this job, and the cost will be so much, and I want your approval before I spend that money because part of it--the mosaic, of course--will be coming to me." We were cut off the phone, cut off the line. I called right back, and his secretary answered, and I said, "I was discussing the building with Mr. Ahmanson, and we were cut off. May I talk to him again?" She said, "Mr. Sheets, you were not cut off. He hung up. He said to tell you if you called back that this is your problem." At that point I thought, well, to hell with you, we'll do it.

GOODWIN: Right. [laughter]

SHEETS: So we went at it, and we did it.

GOODWIN: What was the additional cost?

SHEETS: Oh, it was nothing in those days--I think $37,000 for all of the art, which was a tremendous amount of sculpture. Oh, boy.

Anyway, when the building was finished and we were taking the bullworks down, the wall along the street to protect the pedestrians from your building and so forth, it was on a Friday morning. I was planning to call him that afternoon for a Saturday morning walk-through, because he told me he wanted a turnkey job. The telephone rang in the job office. I practically lived in that job office on that job, and I had beaten everybody's ears down on costs. He knew what he was doing. I saved so much money on that building by making people think they were lucky to be part of it. The telephone rang about eleven o'clock in the morning, and I answered it, and he said, "Sheets?" I said, "Yes." He said, "This is Howard." He said, "Why didn't you tell me you were taking those barricades down?" "Well," I said, "we aren't done with them. We're just taking them down, and I had planned this afternoon to call you and see if I could make a date with you tomorrow morning or Monday morning, whichever was most convenient." He said, "I'll be there in five minutes." In five minutes he drove through the rear entrance into the most beautiful garden. I had moved trees that were thirty-five and forty years old. I had planted lawn by the method where you move turf. The place looked like it had been there for fifty years. There was a great court in the back where all the employees could go out and have lunch, with a beautiful fountain. There was a suite of offices for him and a boardroom,

which was separate entirely from the big operation of the insurance company because he was handling many different organizations at the time. Then there was space for the operation of the insurance company as well as a lounge for all of the secretaries.

He drove in the back and parked exactly where I designed for him to park. He got out of his car and stood there, and his eyes just turned. You've never seen the intensity with which he swept that whole courtyard. Then he moved forward about twenty feet and looked down into the sunken part of it, looked at it, turned to me, no smiles, no anything, just blank, said, "Where do we start?" Well, I thought we had already started, but anyway I took him back through the rear entrance, which I designed really for him, so he wouldn't have to go out through the main office. I took him into the boardroom, where I had the most beautiful fireplace and a sculpture as an integral part of the fireplace, marvelous furniture, and a special table that I designed and had built. I took him into his offices. I even had beautiful models of fire engines made that cost me two or three thousand dollars apiece. I just wanted to make this so personal to him. And, oh, I bought one of the greatest Japanese screens, one I wish I owned myself today, that I hung in the boardroom. I did everything as he had said, "For me." He goes over to his desk, which was, boy, it was a Cadillac of desks. I designed

every inch of it, and it had been built by Columbia Showcase Company.

He goes over, sits down in this big chair, puts his feet right smack up in the middle of that desk, and he just sat there. It was forty-five or fifty minutes that he kept looking around. There were beautiful recessed cases for some of his yachting trophies and so forth. He just roamed around there, no word, no excitement, no disdain, no "yes," no "no." Finally he got up and asked, "Where do we go next?" We went through the whole building like that, a step at a time.

Finally we went out to what I thought was the most exciting entrance to the building, the entrance lobby. I had sculptured grills and all kinds of things. He looked it all over, every inch of it, walked out the front door, looked along the street, walked across the street, leaned up against a lamppost and started to laugh. By this time I'm mad. It was two and a half hours from the time that guy had arrived; it was almost two o'clock in the afternoon. He hadn't said one kind word, and he started to laugh. I thought, well, you laughing son of a bitch, it's no laughing matter if you'd spent a year and a quarter on a project, and this is the reaction. He turned to me and he said, "Millard, you know, I thought a lot of times when the bills came in on this building that I was a little whimsical when I said, 'Do it the way you want to do it for yourself.'

But I want to tell you something." He said, "I am so crazy about it, but that is only half of it. This is going to make money, which I didn't plan." I said, "What do you mean it's going to make money?" He said, "This is going to sell insurance." I said, "Well, okay, but if you like it, it's okay." He said, "I'm crazy about it. Start the other one tomorrow." Well, that was our relationship for so many years that it was really incredible. And of course that's when I discovered that if you design a building that requires art, they would have to use it.

GOODWIN: Right.

SHEETS: Secondly, he had the sense to know that it was going to make business. Neither of us could believe the attention that that little piddling building got. It was on Wilshire Boulevard, and unfortunately we had to tear it down when we built the big Ahmanson Center. There was no way of explaining how the public reacted to that damn building. It was incredible. It was in all the magazines; it got awards, everything. It was just crazy.

So when we finished the next one, in the first ten days after it opened, $19 million walked in the front door.

GOODWIN: Wow.

SHEETS: The use of that money paid for the entire building--the property, the furnishings, the landscaping, all of the art--in the first ten days; it more than paid for it. The

longest that any of those Ahmanson buildings have taken to pay for themselves is six months. That's the longest.

GOODWIN: How many have you done since?

SHEETS: About forty.

GOODWIN: Forty!

SHEETS: So it is not an accident. I mean there's no question but that the public responds to a kind of presence, if you can create it. Now I have no illusions about how good they are. I can tell you more about what's wrong with my buildings than any other person in the world. I can take the gaff that the architects and a lot of other people throw at me because, number one, I've never compromised, ever, on any building I've ever done. If they're bad, it's my fault, not Mr. Ahmanson's or Home Savings or anybody's else. I design them for a purpose, and I design them with the best taste that I can put in them. I get the best artists that I can, although I can't always get the ones that I want. I know there's a challenge and that it's the reaction of the public that's important. The reaction has been so extravagantly good, in terms that people just like to be identified with the buildings, they like to go there and see the art; they like to feel that it's a different flavor than they usually get. Now, of course, there's been more and more of it done since we did it in those early days, as there will be more and more. But I think the astounding thing is that for

twenty-seven years, even after Howard's death nine or ten years ago, the company has gone right on with the same idea. That's why I say I don't think in the history of this country have there ever been an opportunity for an artist to do what I've been able to do without trying to sell anything or in any way trying to do anything except what the client really wants. They need it. They know it. There isn't any question about it.

This, of course, led to so many exciting things, such as the development of a regular staff to do stained glass, which we do in Pasadena. To keep the number of artists that have been involved in these buildings that I've done going full time with years of work ahead, with no question about whether they have a job or not, it's a pretty exciting thing that I've been able to do. The number of incredible commissions that I've been able to give artists all over the United States, not only for Howard Ahmanson but for the banks in Texas and other places that I've done work, is amazing, always because people traveling to California saw these things, got in touch with me, and said, "We need this down here," "We need this down there." One down here leads you to another place and another place. I've never solicited a job, ever.

It isn't because they're that good. It's because we've tried to create something that people would feel excited about being connected with. That's the only basis

that can explain it. Howard and I were the most shocked of all, in both instances, by the response to the first two buildings. Then Home began to put out questionnaires. They said on the questionnaires, "Why do you choose Home Savings?" Well, a small percent, I would say maybe 8 percent of people, ever answered questionnaires; but out of the percentage that did answer it, 90 percent said, "Your buildings look like you're a solid company. Your buildings have a feeling that we enjoy. We're proud to bank in your buildings." Now, you can't knock it. When some of the architects call them mausoleums, fine. Don't they wish they had a client that lasted twenty-seven years and went on and on supporting what they did?

We're starting a whole new thing now that is going to come out pretty soon. For twenty-five years at least, Home Savings has given around $20,000 a year to San Francisco and Los Angeles for their big art festivals. Well, those things have been so badly run in most instances in the last ten years that they've become obnoxious--I mean, really bad. Now we have started on a totally new plan, where I'm sure we're going to do something of significance for the artist, really significant, on a level that will attract a totally different brand of everything. It will assure me the use of very exciting works in all of these buildings, original works. Instead of buying reproductions and things to put in the private offices and so forth, we're going to

be able to use original works. And Home is interested as hell in this, not in a kind of cheap, lip-service way.

Howard himself became an art collector, and so many of the other people have become very involved as people who demand art in their own lives and in their own homes. Into a large number of homes, I've been able to get marvelous things done by artists, because they come to me and they say, "Where can I get these things?" Well, it's exciting. I believe so deeply that if you are really anxious to solve problems, that the problems are thicker and they'll come to you faster than you can keep up with them.

Of course when we got really involved in these Home Savings things we became excitingly involved with glass and metal and wood and stone and mosaics. We have had tapestries woven for twenty years. Where I want a sound problem quieted down, instead of using hard material, I use a tapestry. I designed a lot of them, and I had a lot of them designed by other artists, sometimes from my own staff. The beauty of it is that these artists have learned to believe that there is a place for them. And they're not doing compromising things. Anything you saw over there on the floor today [in the mosaic studio] is the best that we can do. If it isn't good, it's our fault.

TAPE NUMBER: VIII, SIDE ONE

JANUARY 11, 1977

GOODWIN: Last session we began to discuss Mr. Sheets's work with Home Savings and Loan. He explained how, when he was commissioned to do the first building, Mr. Ahmanson was looking for a building which was much more interesting than the ones he knew on Wilshire Boulevard. He was also looking for a building that would be interesting thirty-five years after it was built. What were the other criteria he had in mind and others that you employed in designing the Home Savings buildings?

SHEETS: I think that's a very good question, George. He felt that in most American commercial buildings there had been a lack of art--not merely in terms of perhaps hanging pictures, but art that was integrated into the design of the building, both in sculpture and in murals of various kinds. His general reaction, I should say, to our surroundings was that we were rather culturally deficient in this respect. He believed that people would be very much interested in the inclusion of the arts. He said, "I don't have any idea how to go about it, I don't know where you would go for artists other than yourself or whom you might choose, and I think we should definitely, from the very beginning, think in terms of including art--not in some superficial way but in a way that would make the building

more exciting and create a presence that doesn't exist in most commercial buildings." He said, "Most of them are at best well decorated by good furniture and occasional hangings and reproductions and so forth, but I want something that is really a part of the building."

So from the very beginning, I, needless to say, was delighted to think of the building as being not a form that you left a space or two and marked "mural" or "mosaic" or something else in, but as a form that required these arts to be an integral part of it. The sculpture was, of course, related both in scale and material. Sometimes we worked in bronze. Sometimes we worked in fired ceramic that became an actual part of the body of the building. We also carved, in many instances, right into the live stone. We've worked in almost every way that you can work in sculpture. We've had a great deal of work done in wood as well as in bronze and metals of various kinds. We've welded as well as cast. In mosaics we've gone the gamut. I guess in a period of over twenty-seven years, we must have done at least seventy-five mosaics in Home buildings alone. But very often we had more than one facade in which we've used mosaics. We've worked them inside the buildings as well as outside. The response to mosaics is really very exciting. People like the richness of the glass and the vibration of the textures. And of course, the ideas: we've nearly always used symbols that would symbolize

Home Savings--the family, the home. Or sometimes if it's an industrial area, or if it's in a highly recreational area, we've tried to do subjects that seem to fit the best we can into the area as well as to become architecturally right.

GOODWIN: Is there a formula you've developed?

SHEETS: I would say to a degree. And to a degree we've been frozen, too, based upon the success of the early buildings. The early buildings were phenomenally successful from the point of view of the company or the corporation. What I mean by that is that the public reaction was so strong that the first Home Savings building literally paid for itself in the first ten days of operation. We built that building on Wilshire Boulevard in the heart of Beverly Hills, right across the street on the same north side from where they had been doing business for about nine years. In nine years the old building had taken in approximately $11 million in deposits. It was a very nice building, not unattractive, but it didn't have anything specifically to separate it from the other things on Wilshire Boulevard. When we built the new building, we had both mosaic and sculpture, and it had a different feeling entirely. In the first ten days, $19 million walked in the front door. Now, that was a great shock to Mr. Ahmanson, and it was probably a greater shock to me because neither of us had been thinking in terms of this being so important to

business. But immediately it was apparent that it was important to business. And as years went on, they made many polls. They had customers fill out various kinds of questionnaires. Out of the small number of people that do fill out the questionnaires, some 90 percent of them said the reason they came to Home was they admired the buildings and had felt pride in banking in such a building.

Well, we got to the point where we couldn't knock what they were saying. We had to accept it. That had a disadvantage because once that had been established, Mr. Ahmanson was very afraid of changing the basic scheme of things. That's why there has been certain repetition of using, for instance, travertine on the outside, of using certain things that have made the buildings always recognizable. Of course, when I designed that first shield, which I designed just as a symbol of Home Savings, I didn't know I was going to see it twenty times a day on television and in some forty-five buildings now. It's something that has become . . .

GOODWIN: A trademark?

SHEETS: . . . a definite trademark. It's a logo that is well established. The same thing with the mosaics. The family theme I have wanted to break away from--not always by any means, because I think it's a fine theme. The home is absolutely what Home is all about, and I can't suggest that we could have a better one. But on occasions it would be interesting to deviate a great deal, just for a particular

place or for some special purpose. But that's been rather frozen.

The whole idea of monolithic buildings, I've never been able to get them to give up. Lots of times I wanted to use a lot of glass, say, on the north side of the building. But they have gotten the feeling from the public that they like the sense of security that these buildings have had. I know lots of architects and designers have made fun of them and have referred to them on several occasions--it always comes back to me--as being rather like mausoleums, but I think many of them wish that they could design a couple of mausoleums that would produce the incredible return, which is, after all, what an architect or a designer is supposed to do, in my opinion. It is to serve the need of the client.

At the same time, I have to say unequivocally that I have never done one thing on those buildings to compromise my own personal understanding or taste. If the buildings are not good, it's because I lack whatever they lack. I don't wish ever to suggest that the client has put me into a corner. I've always taken the facts--the particular terrain where a building is, the size of the property, the budget that is involved, and the use of the building--into consideration, and I have done the best job I can knowing that those are facts I must deal with.

GOODWIN: So you don't try and cater to the public's image of what fine art is?

SHEETS: Not at all. If I catered at all, it's to my own concept. It hasn't changed too much, although I would have loved to have had more flexibility. One time, for instance, I complained strongly to Mr. Ahmanson. I didn't really complain--I just in a very enthusiastic way said, "Howard, it's time that we grew a little bit. Let me do three or four different concepts for this new building. It's a very important building." He said, "Fine, go ahead. Let's see what you do." I made four very complete designs for the same building--that is, a building that had to go on one spot--and I took all four of them in. He looked at them with very serious thought. I know he gave them a great deal of consideration, and he finally ended up by saying, "Millard, I like all of them. But I'm not willing to gamble, to change the image to the extent that three of these buildings do." He said, "I'll stick with this fourth one, which is a little nearer what we do. You can always have latitude, but I just know that it's foolish for us to get off of something that we know is right. The image is established. Whether all people like it or not isn't the important thing." [laughter] "Masses of people who put their money there for security and for return are, after all, the reason that we've spent the money to do the buildings."

I think it's an interesting lesson. It convinces me that to simply impose a personal artist's style or a personal

artist's attitude upon all problems, regardless of what the problem is, is not a good solution to a problem. I've known some marvelous designers whose work I admire tremendously, but many of the buildings are nonfunctional. They do not produce what we're talking about here in the way of return in a free enterprise system for an investment. In the private home, that's a totally different matter, and in many other instances you are not tied down. But in most instances, you are tied down to the problem that someone is going to invest in the building. They buy the land, they pay for the building, and they have a tremendous amount of money involved. I think it is the duty of the designer to think out the needs and the solutions, recognizing that if you are working with this part of the public or the whole part of the public, which in this case we are, it makes a difference how you solve the problem. I suppose if you're doing a museum and you're appealing primarily to a certain type of sophistication, that you might have a chance to do certain things that you wouldn't have in a building like this, although we have had astounding reactions from all sections of life, and that's pleasing to me as a designer. It doesn't tell me that the buildings are any better, but I do know I've solved the problem.

GOODWIN: What are the various steps involved in building a building, as far as you're concerned?

SHEETS: The first problem--and it's getting to be the most

difficult headache of the whole business--is the limited terrain you have. Of course it's becoming more and more necessary to get a great deal more property to do the same thing because of the controls now that are imposed upon every building by new requirements. I'm not speaking of the safety requirements of the building restrictions. Building restrictions, I would fight to agree with until the last dog was hung, because they're safety factors. But when you get into aesthetics and into questions of taste, the new kind of standards that are being set up by, often, very young and inexperienced people, or people who are strictly bureaucratic in their approach, become so unreasonable. Whereas it used to take a matter of months to get a building through a city, generally it takes a year to two years today. The commissions seem to have little or no interest in whether you ever get it through or not. It's a strange period we're going through of bureaucratic control.

Now the parking problem has become, obviously, one of the chief problems. I can't disagree today with the requirements that are laid down by most cities for parking. But it's astounding how much more property you have to have for parking than you have for building: maybe four-to-one or five-to-one or sometimes six-to-one, depending upon the intensity of the area. These are all problems you have to face. Before you can think about anything creatively, you got to get a ground plan that takes up so much space. Now,

we know that an office that is going to have, let's say, twenty-four windows and eighteen new-account desks calls for a certain-sized building. We know before we even start the building that we cannot squeeze extra desks and windows into anything that isn't big enough. So right from the start we know the building's going to be, let's say, 90 x 120. That's just the building. Now, the moment you establish that the percentage of usable space in that building dictates the number of cars per 100 square feet in the building, so you have to multiply or divide or whatever it is and get your number of cars. Then you've got to figure ingress: where the city will let you come in or off from the street. They're getting very much tougher about that all the time, which they should, because of the safety factors. I would never fight most of those problems. Once in a while they're unreasonable, but generally speaking I've found that that kind of an engineer is a person you can deal with. They're not the bureaucratic boneheads that you run into on the architectural design committees.

Most of these people came out of one school. I think we mentioned this, didn't we? The new School of Architecture at the University of California at Berkeley has been primarily turning out city planners and people who have only one interest, and that is planning the future of everybody else's life. Most of them are not trained as architects, even though they claim to be, and they have a very inner

clique now that is operating in almost all the small cities of California, and they're creeping into the big cities. These people who have graduated primarily from that school, where they have really been doing social planning more than anything else, have become extremely arbitrary and extremely tough to deal with. They've got so much support from the ecologists today, the ecologists not understanding entirely what they're supporting, but they get backing that gives them the possibility of really putting people into corners.

I had a recent experience with one of these fairly good-sized cities, in how one of these planners operates. Now, you must go and see them perhaps two months before you submit even your first rough, preliminary concept in order to pay lip service to them and also to get whatever ideas they will give you, which are very guarded because they don't want to be responsible for anything that you do; they just want to be a critic. That's easy, you know, if you get guys coming back ten times, twelve times, or fifteen times, and I made seventeen trips in one of these cities before I got the design through. It was bureaucratic control, and never any advice, always criticism. It is getting more arbitrary and more arbitrary. During the early stages of that particular experience, I said, "Now, where are the rules in your building setup here in the city that say this has to be and that has to be and this cannot be?" He said, "We don't have any of them." I said, "What power do you

have?" He answered, "Well, if you want to get this thing through the city, you'll do it the way we want it or else you're not going to get it through. We'll create too many roadblocks for you." Now, that's pretty threatening, and it's pretty sad, too, and it's pretty shocking in terms of our times. I'm not speaking only about my problems; I'm speaking about every single architect and designer I know. They are just going crazy.

Then, of course, the Coastal Commission was infinitely worse. That added a totally new dimension to the problem because they were taking upon themselves responsibilities and decisions that they were absolutely out of range on. They didn't know what they were doing, and they were so arbitrary, and they stopped more good things from happening than you can believe.

You have to consider all these things in answering your question, which was, "What are the first things?" Well, first you have to be sure you're meeting all the standards--or not even standards; they're requirements. Sometimes they're good standards, and sometimes they're arbitrary.

Well, then, from that point on, the fun begins. Then it's really exciting. You say we're going to work in this area along this line because it fits into the community. We don't always copy the style of the other people; I don't mean that. But I wouldn't want to put a very polished granite or marble building in the middle of an area that's

surrounded with a bunch of brick and wood and plaster, though sometimes we do. Even in those areas, if we have a separate site that's so completely by itself, with nothing around it, we can do it. But we try to fit in, not only in subject matter for the art end of it but in the materials we use.

We're doing a building right now that is going to be a dark brick, which we haven't ever used before, because the buildings around it are mostly dark brick, and we like to fit in. We don't want to be a sore thumb. On the other hand, we're not going to lose our image, either. We're going to keep the forms that will make it work. So your function is first, after you get all the long-range planning out of the way.

After you get the function inside operating, then the outside nearly always grows pretty simply and clearly--the choice of materials, the size of openings, the amount of decoration--and then I'm always involved completely with the planting as well as the furnishings.

GOODWIN: Do the people that work for you do the plans?

SHEETS: I do all of the designing, every bit of it. I detail everything, but I have marvelous people working with me who put it all down in final working drawings. In the old days we did everything. At one time I had four architects working for me and about ten draftsmen and engineers. We did the whole thing right in our office. But as time has gone on, I have been working with Home Savings in a

new dimension. I'm now the director of their design program. I still design the buildings, and I have my own staff. I have two architects, who are excellent collaborators with me, and they finish up the preliminary phases of the design, which I present to the client. When those are approved, then I associate with an outside architect, generally in the vicinity where we do the building. If it's in the north, we try to work with architects in the north, for obvious reasons: it's good for them, they know the problems, and they can take the plans in and push them through the building department. They can do the supervision in the early part of the work, when you're excavating and putting in all your rough framing and steel and all that. Then I do all the supervision for the final stages, when we put in all the final finishes and the landscaping.

GOODWIN: Is there a so-called art budget for each building?

SHEETS: Well, fortunately, Home Savings has never ever wanted to segregate it. Now that's not true of most corporations, believe me. That's why I think Home is so very unusual in having continued this approach for some twenty-six or -seven years now. They've never backed away from the idea that the arts were essential, since they proved to be good in the first two or three buildings. They have never backed away from this. And even though Mr. Ahmanson died ten or more years ago, his nephews, Bill and Bob Ahmanson, and other members of the board who've carried on have never

wavered, really at all, in the idea of the importance of the arts. We don't really have a set budget. They know that I am going to use it only where I think it's going to do us the most good. I would never just pad it with anything, but wherever I think that we can get a good public response to catch attention, we'll use it. We do probably as much on the outside as we do on the inside, if not more, for that reason: that it gives the passerby a sense of what is going on inside, and inside, we make it as beautiful as we can.

I can't overstate the importance of the landscaping, because we try, when we open a building, to make it look like it's been there for fifteen or twenty years and not like it's a freshly planted building. We buy beautiful, big trees and spend a great deal of time and a great deal of money moving them. We bring them into the community as though they've really been established for a long time. People appreciate this very much, the public as a whole. Certainly it makes it more fun for me because landscaping is just as much a part of the building as all the interior furnishings. That's why I do them all in my office.

GOODWIN: Can you give me some idea of costs? What do you spend on mosaics and sculpture and things like that, compared to the overall expenses?

SHEETS: Let's just take one figure, for example. Let's say the building costs a million dollars. Of course in

the old days, our buildings didn't cost anything like that. The first building we built in Beverly Hills, I know that we built for under twenty dollars a square foot, including all of the art, but that was twenty-six years ago. Our buildings today run probably in the area of around thirty-six to thirty-eight dollars, including the art, per square foot. I would say that, on a million dollar building, we would probably spend in the neighborhood of $80,000 for art. Now that would include the mosaics. It would include whatever murals or tapestries were inside, and it would include stained-glass windows.

We use a great many stained-glass windows. I did it sort of as a fluky idea in the first building because I always wanted to make a stained-glass window, and I thought it would be fun to do a window showing different periods of barter in the ancient days. I never thought I'd be doing more than one of these things. I used the theme of money and bartering, and the development of money. I had some beautiful engraved glass panels. Then I had bartering done in stained glass as a frame around these money symbols, from the ancient Egyptian coming on through into all the different cultures. Well, the response to stained glass was surprising. I'd always thought of it as being primarily something that would go into a church or a synagogue or in a building of that kind, but not at all. The public just simply reacts to the stained glass as a most exciting sort

of a thing. I think the color is what does it and the brilliance of the glass. There's hardly a building that doesn't have major stained glass. I've just finished one in San Francisco, and I saw the glass up in place last Friday. It's probably fifty feet wide, though it isn't completely solid--there are some clear, interesting spaces in it--but it's about thirty feet high. Now, that's a huge window.

The most exciting thing about these windows to me is that one of the young ladies [Susan Hertel] who has worked with me for twenty-four years does all the stained-glass designing now. She does all of the execution of it along with the glass man who's been here in Pasadena a long time, John Wallace. She makes the original design in color on a scale sketch. Then she blows the thing up full size into a full-size cartoon. Then she takes the cartoon, after having broken it down into every shape of every piece of glass and all the leading and everything else, into the Wallace studio, and she picks every single color out of probably more than a thousand colors which she has there to select from. Then after the glass is cut and mounted with hot wax on a huge plate glass she goes in and does all of the painting on the glass, freehand, just looking at her sketch. She's a master, really, at both the drawing and design. Then after she finishes doing the painting, the glass is fired. That paint that she uses is not paint,

of course; it's really a black glass powder, and it's put on with sugar water, which, mixed with this glass powder, makes a thick little paste that you can paint with. Then when that goes into the electric kiln, it fires and becomes an integral part of the glass. It can never be removed; it's a finished, permanent thing. Then it's leaded and put into the window frames and then taken out on the job. It's a complete process. But that's become one of the most fascinating things in our buildings, I think, from the public point of view.

We work very much also with tapestries, and people do respond to them. Those are woven either in Aubusson in France or in Portugal. We've done a great deal of work with tapestries.

We also work in ceramic tile; we've done some huge murals, both at Home Savings and in other places. I developed some special glazes with some very fine ceramic engineers over a period of about nine years when I was the head of design for the Interpace Corporation. We were doing experimental work, and as a result of that, we were able, literally, to paint in glaze, which is something that's never been done before by anyone. There have been marvelous things done in Persia and all over the world in clay and tile, but the glazes were all underglazes, meaning that they put on a kind of a slip glaze, and it was all fairly narrow in color range. They did get some beautiful blues,

brilliant yellows, and reds, but they were slip glaze and they were very low fire. Then on top of that they put a shield of glass painted on, which, when fired, protected this slip glaze. That's a technique that's ancient. It goes back a couple of thousand years at least, probably more like 3,000 or 4,000. But for the first time we were able to develop a full palette. Any color that you've ever seen in paint, we were able to develop and to make a one-fire proposition out of it, which was just unheard of before. For instance, they could never fire the best reds at the same temperature that they would fire a blue. One or the other would give up the ghost and disappear or turn into another color. It took us years to do this, but we developed it. What these ceramic engineers did is an incredible accomplishment. They accomplished it mainly because I goaded them into it, and also they had the company to back it and they spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in research on this project. So I was able to take advantage of those things, and we've done some big ceramic murals.

GOODWIN: It sounds like many of the media used in Home Savings buildings--stained glass, mosaics, tapestries--are media of, as you suggested, the medieval world, churches and so on.

SHEETS: That's right, that's absolutely true.

GOODWIN: But on the other hand, I'm reminded of the fact

that Picasso and Miró and Matisse and Chagall and Léger, all these people, have revived many of the same media.
SHEETS: Absolutely. I think that's the exciting thing about modern painting and modern art. When painting became so completely photographic, as it did toward the end of the nineteenth century, and modern art developed as a revolution against that slavery to the eye, along with it came a tremendous, renewed interest in primitive art, as you well know, influence of the African art, the influence of the early, early, early Renaissance and before, going way back into archaic Greece and archaic China and everywhere else. I think that, naturally, as the artists went back for inspiration--and they did, no question about it--they became much more concerned with the beauties of Byzantine architecture and Byzantine sculpture and Romanesque, and also in the materials in which these great art works were expressed. There has been a tremendous revival.

What makes me sad is that it isn't an integral part of education again. Now they do teach a lot of ceramics, but mostly a very limited view of that field. It's not a limited field--it's a fantastic field. They do teach occasionally a little bit of piddling stained glass. Most of the sculpture is abstract and welded or carved out of wood or something. But to get back to the point where they make people free, they just aren't doing enough of it, because these materials mean extra opportunities for

artists. The more materials you work in and the more you understand and master, to a degree at least, the more exciting your possibilities are as a human being, as an artist to meet special needs.

I remember all my life that people have come to me with problems that were completely outside of my realm. It's appalling if you're reaching out how these things come towards you without any soliciting on your part. I've always felt it's an exciting challenge. Well, how did an artist handle this material? The only way to find out is to do it, and you do it. I think I described that to you in painting fresco. I'd never painted a fresco until I won a competition, and then you read a book and figure out a few logical things and you go about it. But that should be part of an artist's education.

GOODWIN: Which of the several Home Savings buildings have you enjoyed doing the most? Which are the ones you think are the most successful?

SHEETS: Well, from the point of view of putting ideas and building and function together, I think maybe the one in Hollywood. The one at Sunset and Vine is a good one because there we happened to have a site which was the particular site where the first full-length motion picture was made in Hollywood. So without having to search too much for themes, we decided that we'd make motion pictures the theme of the art in the building. I designed a semiabstract

arrangement on the front of the building, underneath the overhang. I made some very simple stripes of figures with an organic sort of a movement through them. Then between those were black granite panels, vertical stripes that had hundreds of names carved into them in gold of the great stars in Hollywood. So it's a little bit like the history of Hollywood, just to go stand in front and read the names. But between the names are many portraits, full-length figure portraits of some of the greatest stars. This was a hell of a problem because it isn't too difficult to cut a head or do a figure in mosaic, but when we found ourselves trying to do portraits of people that everybody in the world knows through motion picture, it was a hell of a challenge. It was very exciting because I think we did keep them as works of art, solid and simple. At the same time they do work, and people do know who they are. There are some of those also on the rear side of the building.

On the interior, Sue Hertel, this young gal whom I mentioned worked for me, did a stained-glass window that I think is one of the most exciting windows, one of the best I've ever seen. We were fooling around for ideas or subject matter, and I said, "Sue, I've got a great idea, the chase. All of the early pictures somebody was chasing somebody. The Indians were chasing the cowboys and vice versa, and in the Mac Sennett comedies, everybody was chasing everybody. Buster Keaton was being chased. Even

Moby Dick was being chased. Let's do it like a series of film strips, some big and wide and strong and some narrower, and we'll show the little perforations along the edge of the strip to suggest that it is film. Then in a very abstract way, let's do this whole window just full, again, of the kind of thing that made motion pictures what they were in the early days." That's one that everybody admires. It's been reproduced in all sorts of magazines all over the country. The tourist agencies run busloads of people out there every week in Tanner buses to look at the building because it's a kind of a landmark now. I painted a mural on the inside with the theme of the actual shooting of the first full-length picture ever made in Hollywood. That building has become a kind of a landmark in many ways for a lot of people.

It has a big pool out in front, and I was able to buy an early [Paul] Manship sculpture which he did for an estate in Delaware. Some of the owners died, and we were able to buy the sculpture. We had it in storage for about six or eight years before I decided how to use it. I built a special fountain on the corner, a great place for hippies (in the worst of the hippie days) to wash their feet, but finally they outgrew that. But it's a fun building.

Of course, the original building I like. But there are many; they're so different.

GOODWIN: What is your role in designing a mosaic?

SHEETS: I have designed most of the mosaics myself completely, and Sue, in these latter years, has done a few mosaics herself. She's marvelous. She does the most beautiful work. But I've designed most all of them, which means that I make a small sketch, a color sketch in scale, an inch to a foot. I then blow it up full size. Sue has always helped me tremendously on the cartoons. We work together so closely that we don't know where one works and the other leaves off, really, we've worked so long together. Then with my color sketch she goes into the mosaic studio every day and checks on the color that the cutters are using, so that they can't get it out of value or out of color. That's been our routine for twenty-some years because we've been making our own mosaics for over twenty years. We started out by having them made in Italy. I used to go over to Italy and give them the cartoons and the color sketches.

GOODWIN: In Venice?

SHEETS: In Venice mostly and once or twice in Germany. They did very good work, but having our own studio is the exciting thing to me, having young people coming along. We show them a sketch, then we give them a very finished cartoon from which they make the tracings on which they actually paste their glass. After they reach a certain point, it becomes a very creative process, and there's as much quality that comes out of their skill and imagination

as there is in whatever we have as a basic design. The basic design isn't going to change, but the quality of the cutting makes for the excitement within it. Of course, in the days of Byzantium, when you cut each piece and just pushed it into a piece of wet cement, you had a fresh quality that was magnificent. You could tilt each glass a little and pick up a little different facet of light, particularly in the golds. That's a marvelous quality. But there's no way that this can be done today, where a building is being built for a year or a year and a quarter. You wouldn't even get a wall to work on until the last matter of weeks, at the most. Some of these mosaics take us six or eight months to execute in my studio. So the only way to do it is to do it on paper and then have a very top craftsman put it up. We have been able over a period of time to develop the kind of people to do that expertly. It's a very interesting process putting all these different kinds of people together. Preparing the wall even before we get to it is important as a part of the building construction, because you can't apply a mosaic to a cement wall without proper preparation of the wall. Everything has to be done exactly right: the thickness when the finished wall is done must fit the moldings or other surfaces that it comes against. It's a very intricate problem, but exciting.

GOODWIN: What are your methods as far as developing a

design for, say, a mural program? Do you struggle with an idea and arrange and rearrange it or do you more or less flash on what you want and it's there?

SHEETS: Well, as you get more experienced you flash a little more, but I've never found a time it wasn't to a certain degree a struggle. If you don't struggle, you aren't growing. I don't try to repeat, although I do some things that, I suppose, look like repeats. First of all, I try to decide on an area that's going to be exciting, the shape of the area, whatever it is, because we just don't do rectangles, we do vignettes; we do all sorts of things to fit into the building and on the building. Then I discuss with myself the best subject matter for that building in that particular locale. Now we're working a great deal in northern California and central California and down in San Diego and all over the state, which gives us a lot of range in differences of subject matter. Once you decide on the subject matter, then a good deal of it just comes naturally out of your head from having been working with certain types of subject matter. I generally try to get my basic, central forms, whatever they are, placed in an interesting way, and then begin to build around them. Or if I have to do research, very often I'm very excited about something I find in there. Maybe I have a totally new concept of what I really wanted the centers to be.

GOODWIN: Does that mean you go to a library and look up the history of an area?

SHEETS: Oh, yes, you bet, absolutely. But not only that. I have a very large library up in my studio up north. Because of this purpose, it's essential; it's absolutely essential to have material without always having to chase it. I buy books continuously. Whenever I have a new job that requires something, rather than go to the library, I just buy whatever number of books I can get on the subject. Sometimes I just read the text; sometimes there are interesting photographs of the period or something that gives you the costume or the mechanics of the life. If it's wagons or whatever, you want to be reasonably right. But similarly, you don't want to be handicapped by that information. So it's a case of putting the two together, creatively and imaginatively, and at the same time not doing something that's going to offend somebody who thinks he's an authority on the period. But books are essential, and research is essential. I've been doing a tremendous amount of that recently for San Francisco. I'm doing a mural inside that is a series of ideas that depict the history of the city, and then on the outside we're doing some mosaics. That's all fun, and it seems to come out naturally.

GOODWIN: Are there any other Home Savings buildings we should mention as being particularly intriguing?

SHEETS: Well, I think the one in San Francisco that we're just finishing is going to be very intriguing. It's going

to have this huge stained-glass window that I mentioned. It will have these two different historical things: on the inside, the painted mural; and then on the outside, the mosaics. We hope to have all original paintings from San Francisco artists on the inside. I'm in the process of getting ready to buy some of those now, so that we'll bring as much as we can of the flavor of the city, contemporary and past, into it.

We're doing a very, very exciting job in San Diego right now. We've done one out in the desert at Barstow that I think really fits into the community. We did one in Victorville many, many years ago that still holds up very well for the desert. We've adjusted to the areas. We've done a temporary job in Santa Maria that I like very much. I think it really fits, and the response of the public has been fantastic. We've done them all over. It's hard to select one right off the top of my head because there's so many. We've done big office buildings in some locations where we use the lower floor for Home Savings, and of course we've done lots of single buildings. We've very often done things like the one in Hollywood, which is just a small, two-story building, backed up by a huge skyscraper and surrounded by a very tall building. It sits there almost like a little, special plum, and it works.

GOODWIN: How long are the buildings built to last?

SHEETS: Well, that's a good question. I think that most

buildings today are built, at the most, for 100 years. It seems a shame to talk and think like that. I think they would last longer than that. They probably would last a couple of hundred years with a basic concrete building or with the steel and brick and other construction. Some of them would last a lot longer than that, but I doubt very much if the function of the building would stay the same.

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SHEETS: You asked the question, George, "How long would these buildings last?" I think physically they could last at least a couple of hundred years, but it's my belief that the function will change radically in banking. I think that a time will come when there will be so much more done electronically than is done today that it won't be necessary to deal with a number of people going in and out of a building, as we do today. I don't even have the imagination to know how far we'll go, but it may all be done over the telephone eventually, with special electronic devices. As it is today, you can go in any Home Savings branch, even without your book, and they can tell you in a matter of about twelve seconds exactly how much you have on deposit. You can deposit money in San Francisco and have it credited to your account in Los Angeles instantly. It's all done by computer, as you know. I've seen so much change even in the last ten years of the twenty-six or -seven years, where our function is changing the nature of what we need. So whereas the building might stand, it might not be a savings and loan building in fifty or so years. I have no way of knowing. But I don't think most commercial buildings are thought of as being more than century buildings.

GOODWIN: Do you have any thoughts, some night when you

can't sleep, about what's going to happen to all those art works?

SHEETS: It is a kind of a strange feeling, when you think back on the hundreds and thousands of years that some buildings have lasted. But on the other hand, I know that probably hundreds of thousands of buildings done in those periods disappeared because they weren't important enough as works of art, as expressions of a society, for people to protect them that long. So I think everybody has to sort of take that into consideration, as much as you'd like to see some of these things last longer. It's probably survival of the fittest in the long run, any way.

GOODWIN: When we first began discussing your work with Home Savings, you said that you were the toughest critic of some of the work you've done. You could offer the best criticism.

SHEETS: Oh, I believe so. I believe so. I think that if you aren't, you aren't growing. If you're satisfied that everything you've done is all right, it would be a terrible thing. I don't ever feel that. I feel that I'm sometimes very pleased that I've been able to do as well as I've done, but I think that I know my mistakes more quickly than anyone else.

GOODWIN: What would you do over if you had the opportunity or the need? What would you modify, perhaps?

SHEETS: Well, I'll give you just an illustration. I did a building in Santa Monica [2600 Wilshire Boulevard] which

is a fairly good-sized building. 1 had a front elevation that was turned exactly at a 45-degree angle to the corner, then two wings that came forward. They didn't go straight across, like many of our 45-degree corner buildings have done. I'm not objecting to that at all. But instead of doing, as I generally do, smaller, vignetted mosaics in the middle of perhaps a dark colored granite or something, I did a whole panel. It's one of the biggest ones we've done. We actually used the same plans twice. We used it in Anaheim as well as in Santa Monica, though we had totally different themes in the mosaic in Santa Monica than in the one in Anaheim. I would never do it again. It's too much mosaic. It's too much in a rectangle. It's like an over-sized painting. I wince every time I go by it. Now, people like the mosaic, and I don't think it's one of the greatest, but it's a satisfactory mosaic. Certainly I designed it--so I haven't anybody to blame but myself. But I would never do that again, because I think it's far too separate from the building, and it should never be separate. It should be an integral part.

I like the mosaic best, for instance, in Pasadena. I think we have some perfectly beautiful mosaics. They're long, narrow panels. They're vertical, and they are rectangular. We used some Persian poetry translated into English. There are some tall cypress trees with figures and some poetry at the bottom. They just seem to be

beautiful on that building, and they're not overpowering. You could pass by and maybe not see them or if you wanted to look, they're there. I kind of like that feeling more and more all the time and seem less and less concerned about the size of things, but more about what they do. Now, that's a criticism.

I think in some cases maybe I'd like to have seen it a little taller for its width. Sometimes you're bound by the darned rules and regulations that tell you, you can't build it over twenty-four feet or twenty-eight or thirty-two or something else. You can't always control that, but you can make a stab at it.

In the materials, we've used basically good materials. By that I mean lasting materials. One of the reasons that our buildings hold up well is they don't have to be repainted every five, eight, ten years. If they're in fine materials, they last; they don't even need cleaning for thirty years. For instance, we have a painting contract as a rule in our buildings counting everything on the inside. It probably wouldn't go over three or four thousand dollars on a half-million-dollar building, maybe five thousand or six thousand dollars on a million-dollar building, because we use permanent, beautiful paneling. We use beautiful floors that don't have to be refinished and things like that. Of course, carpeting is something else; you have to put that down once in a while. But the basic building is made out

of materials that people respond to. It's also a good investment for the people who build the building. They save so much money by not having to continuously redo.

One of the problems you have in a big corporate setup like this is that even though you have a fine manager and you have people that are responsible for the upkeep of the buildings, they don't see the things that need to be done as fast as they should see them, if you leave it up to them to take care of painting and a lot of this kind of thing, even the cleaning. You can whip them by doing it the other way, by doing something where it doesn't make much difference if it's cleaned up, dusted, and that kind of thing or not. Then you don't have to worry about it. That's one reason that I think we've been very successful from an economic side. Whereas we spend more money in the beginning, sometimes quite a bit more on the materials, they're permanently there, and you don't have to fool around with them.

GOODWIN: Let me ask a more personal question that I think will be of some curiosity to people who read these transcripts in the future. Are you paid for each building you design or are you paid on a regular salary from Home Savings as a regular employee?

SHEETS: Well, I'm very glad to answer that question. Up until the last about two and a half years, I've been paid for each individual building. I felt very strongly some

two or three years ago that I didn't want to continue at that pace, partly because of my age and partly because of the fact that I want more and more time to paint. So I have been able to work out a very satisfactory arrangement on an annual stipend that is very adequate, from Home Savings. I'm able to have more and more work done after I've done the designing than I used to do. I'm hoping, as you know, in the next matter of months at the most to be as freed of this whole responsibility as I can, because I've been planning, desperately, to paint the rest of my life. The only way to do this is to really get out of this tremendous pressured and exciting world I've lived in. It hasn't been pressure except where I created it; no one else has created it. I've created my own pressure by being that much involved, that much interested. To answer your question, it was always on an individual building basis until in the last two or three years, when, at my request, we've done it the other way.

GOODWIN: Let's talk about another aspect of Home Savings and your relationship with Howard Ahmanson. That is the design of the new County Art Museum.

SHEETS: I didn't have anything to do with that. I didn't have anything to do with the County Art Museum. I did have, I'm confident, a lot to do with his desire to want to build it. We agreed right at the beginning. Though he at first talked very strongly about the idea of my designing

the museum, I persuaded him very quickly, and he was very quick to see, that that could become a political kind of thing that we didn't want any part of. I think he wanted [William] Pereira because they had been very good friends for a long, long time. Pereira was awarded the contract by the county, I think quite definitely due to his persuasion, although I'm sure they considered a great number of architects. I know that my name was thrown into the pot not only by Howard in the beginning, but by other people, but I didn't want to be involved in anything that could get that political.

GOODWIN: So you never prepared any plans?

SHEETS: No. I did a lot of the preliminary designing on the new Ahmanson Center [3701 Wilshire Boulevard], but I didn't do that. That was done by Edward Durell Stone. There have been quite a few buildings, I think five or six, that have been designed by other people than me for Home Savings. When they built office buildings, mainly to be seen easily from a freeway, and they wanted heighth, they've gone to a very good architect who's done a lot of the kind of office buildings (sort of general, rental office buildings, with a Home Savings on the ground floor) an architect named Homolka, who works with me now at a great many of my jobs. After I design them, he does the finish engineering. He's an excellent architect and has good engineers. He is very cooperative, and I enjoy working

with him. Those two big projects that Howard was involved with--well, three counting the [Ahmanson] Theatre, of course, which was done by [Welton D.] Beckett, but the other two I had never really been thought of as doing, and it's better the way it worked out.

GOODWIN: Let's talk now about some of your other major commissions, but for the most part outside of California. Is it correct that you won a competition to do the murals for the Detroit Public Library?

SHEETS: Yes. The National Academy [of Design], which is, of course, in New York, has over the century and a half of its existence, maybe longer, received a tremendous amount of money from artists and from architects and people who have been members or sometimes just friends of the academy. One of the men who gave a great deal of money--I don't know the full extent how much it is--was [Edward Austin] Abbey, who was a very fine mural painter in the late nineteenth and slightly into the twentieth century. He's a good easel painter, but he also painted tremendous murals all over the East, in Washington and various places. When he died, he left a fortune to the academy, which he asked to be devoted to mural painting and to be administered like this: that the academy was to hold competitions, either open or by invitation, and each artist invited to submit a design for a particular project would be paid a reasonable amount for their efforts. Then the academy jury, made up of

architects mainly, with, I think, one painter--something like that--would commission the winning artists. Then the Abbey fund would be used to pay for the entire cost as a gift to a community or to an organization they felt should logically receive such a gift. I don't know that most public organizations know this, but they're eligible for a possibility of this kind by applying to the academy. I don't know really how many they do a year, but for the commission that I won for the Detroit Public Library, I think there were nine artists asked to submit designs. Each one of us was to be paid a certain amount for his sketch, except the artist who won the competition, when the sum would apply toward the total job. And that's what happened.

GOODWIN: Against whom did you compete?

SHEETS: Well, I don't like to say that. There were some marvelous people, believe me, excellent artists. All of them are very well known, probably far better known in the East than I am, and they're nationally very well known, too. But it's one of these things, you know. You come up with an idea that the committee and the architects like.

GOODWIN: What was the nature of the project?

SHEETS: It's over the new entrance, the new front to the Detroit library. They gave no thematic limitations. I took the general theme that ideas really flow like a river

and the library houses the content of all the best ideas of time. I'd have to show you the design. I wish I'd really thought about this, because I could have brought it to discuss it with you. But I used some very large, symbolic figures in the center and on two sides, and then I tied these together with smaller figures. It was a lot of fun. It is a big mosaic. If I remember rightly, it's sixty feet long and twenty-two feet high, and it's under a huge portico. You can see it from quite a distance, so it has to carry well, and at the same time it reads well when you get up close. There's a lot of interesting detail in it. It's very strong.

We executed it here, and I think I told you that we can be so much more creative doing it here in our own studio because that's where the juices flow. You send designs to Europe or for someone else to execute, and it's apt to be deadly in a static reproduction of a sketch. This was one of the first really big, big commissions for a mosaic that we executed here. We went back and put it up ourselves.

GOODWIN: How long were you involved with that project?

SHEETS: About a year. It was a big one, and there were so many big, figurative problems in it. The main figures were about twelve feet high. It's interesting: when you move up in scale from six feet to twelve feet, the problems multiply rather than diminish. To have the simplicity and the powerful form and expressive symbols, you can't fool

anybody. You've just got to really work at it, and I had a great deal of pleasure out of that job.

GOODWIN: It came out to your satisfaction?

SHEETS: Yes, I wouldn't say that I was unhappy about that job at all. I think it came out very well.

GOODWIN: I'd like to see it.

SHEETS: Well, I hope you can.

GOODWIN: Right. Shortly afterwards you did another commission, for the Notre Dame University Library.

SHEETS: Well, that was quite an experience. I had done a very large mural in the new diagnostic center of the Mayo Clinic back at Rochester, Minnesota. I'd worked with a group of architects called Ellerbe and Associates in Minneapolis. These architects were doing tremendous planning all over the world. They built some of the greatest hospitals and some of the greatest huge office buildings and industrial plants. Among other things, they were master-planning and rebuilding the whole Notre Dame campus. This campus was really changing its axis. On one end of this axis, they had a huge library with a big tower, and the architects' original conception showed a mural going up the face of this tower. They presented it to Notre Dame, and it was basically approved. Then they were asked to submit to Notre Dame University names of artists who might be able to do a decoration in a material that would withstand the real tests of time and weather.

Well, they asked me first to send material back, which I did. They submitted my name along with a dozen others to the university, mostly of people who had worked on the Mayo Clinic with them. I think there were twenty-five artists involved in the Mayo Clinic; it's quite a library of mural painting. Every floor has a special work, done by artists from England and the United States and France and, I believe, one from Mexico. So they submitted some dozen names to the University of Notre Dame.

Well, after looking at all the photographs they submitted, they selected me as the potential designer. I went back to the architects' office in Minnesota and spent some time discussing what material we might use to do this mural, because it was a huge affair. It was to be 134 feet high and 68 feet wide. That in itself was the biggest chunk of material I've ever been involved with.

GOODWIN: In other words, it covered the entire facade of the building?

SHEETS: It covered the central part of the tower. There is a heavy, massive stone edge of the tower, probably fifteen feet wide on either side of the mural. But the mural goes straight up from over the entrance door, right up almost to the top of the tower, and that's a very large space.

The problem was what to use. We discussed mosaic, and we talked about how the Mexicans had done it in Mexico City

at the University of Mexico. We discussed all sorts of techniques of mosaic.

One of the engineers was very adamant. He said, "Granite is the only thing that I think we should recommend, because of the tremendous change of heat and cold in South Bend, Indiana. I don't know anything about granite, whether you could get the kind of colors you'd need or whether you could get the kind of feeling you want out of granite, but it should definitely be done in granite." He was a very strong character, and he certainly knew what he was talking about. His arguments were right about why it would stand up for thousands of years, literally, if it was to stay there that long. So he influenced all of us to the point that we decided, well, let's find out about it.

I was told about the granite society--it has a funny name which I don't remember. I wrote to them and said, "How many colors of natural granite are there?" They wrote back, "Twenty-seven." Well, I knew better than that. I just knew that that was not enough. I knew also that even if we had to deal with twenty-seven, that, limited though it might be, by getting different textures, which will last forever on the granite--one polished, one what they call sand finish, and another that they called natural cleavage--that we could get three different colors and three different values out of each of the separate basic colors. But I wasn't satisfied that that was enough. In about a year

and a half, long after I'd started the job, I found 143 colors, which is some difference.

GOODWIN: All around the world?

SHEETS: All around the world. I had friends in Europe and brokers all over who handled marbles and whatnot whom I'd been buying things from, and everybody made a game out of it. They started searching, and when the samples came in, I couldn't believe it.

Well, I went down to Notre Dame, after meeting the architects on that first trip, and met Father [Theodore M.] Hesburgh and his marvelous assistant, Father [Edmund P.] Joyce. I discussed with them the whole idea of this project. They were fascinating. First, Father Hesburgh really shocked me by saying, when I asked them what they had in mind in the way of subject matter, "Millard, that's up to you. We're not going in any way to interfere." Well, I said, "My goodness, this is a huge university, and it's a Catholic university. I should think you'd be deeply concerned with the kind of subject matter." "No, we have to depend upon you, because we've selected you. That's your responsibility." Well, I said, "Haven't you even a little glimmer of a suggestion or an idea?" And they said no. They said, "As a matter of fact, if you want to do something abstract, that's up to you. If you want to do something that's representational, that's up to you. If you want to do something religious, that's up to you. But we want your interpretation."

Well, it was a little bit like my Ahmanson experience, except this was so definitely one thing that it really gave me pause to think. We discussed, quite at length, the idea of granite, and we had a marvelous day really, the three of us together, talking about this whole thing. We had lunch, after we'd had a couple of nice martinis, and after lunch Father Hesburgh suddenly said, "Well, Millard, it's all set. We're going to go, is that right?" I was rather startled, and I looked over and I said, "Well, just a minute. I'm honored that you're pleased that I'm going to do it, that you want me to do it, but we haven't discussed any of the really down-to-earth problems. For instance, how much is such a thing going to cost in granite? It's so wild to consider the combination of the hardness and the difficulty of using this material, the weight of it in the building, I have no idea right off the top of my head to give you an answer. I'm too old to spend a year designing something that you can't afford to put up, because I can't waste a year, even though I'm terribly excited about the project."

"Well," he said, "give me just a wild, way outside kind of a figure, what you think it would cost to execute this thing." I said, "Well, not counting my part in it at all, but just the actual mechanics and the unbelievable engineering and everything else that is involved, it could run $350,000. I don't know--I'm just guessing." And of

course we're talking about almost fifteen years ago, when money was a little different than it is now. He said, "All right, now we've passed that hurdle." I said, "What do you mean, we've passed that hurdle?" He said, "That's my responsibility, I'll get the money--I don't care what it costs. Now, about your fee?" I said, "Well, that's not going to be too difficult. I can give you some kind of a fee," and I threw out kind of a loose figure. I wasn't very smart--it was a little low, quite a little low, but anyway I suggested it. He said, "Now we've passed that hurdle. Let's go. You go back to California and you do your research and come up with your idea, or ideas if you want to submit a couple of ideas; then let me know, and come back, and we'll look at them, and we'll present them to the senate." They have an interesting group there: it would be like the head professors of the university that form the senate. He said, "Now, they're not going to be the ones that are going to be critics. We want to get them excited about it. If they have some suggestions and so forth, we'll be happy to have that, but that's all there'll be to that."

"Well," I said, "now there's one other thing I'd like to discuss with you before I start home and get into this thing. I am not a Roman Catholic. I have no prejudice whatsoever toward any religion or any faith or any race, but I'm not a Roman Catholic, and on top of that I've just finished a huge Scottish Rite cathedral, a Masonic temple,

in Los Angeles. I just don't want to go on under any false colors. You know, I'm not a Mason, and I'm not a Catholic. Now, if these things don't interfere, that's fine." Father Hesburgh laughed--he just laughed out loud--and he said, "Well, you know, the Masons and the Catholics used to fight a little but, what the hell. I did a lot of research on you. I was in California about four months ago doing a Catholic motion picture, and while I was out there I did a lot of research on you, and I knew you were building that thing. There's just one promise that I want you to make: that is, that some day, in my street clothes, you'll take me through it. [laughter] I'm delighted--and forget it. I want to tell you something: Even if I have to get an infidel, I'm going to get who I want to do this job. And you're my infidel."

So we became very, very good friends, as I did particularly with Father Joyce. Oh, what a pair of guys. And the whole staff was marvelous. I came back and I made three different sketches, different ideas, different scale. I took them back, and they all just landed on the one that was similar to the one we finally did. It was my choice, too.

GOODWIN: What were your three ideas?

SHEETS: Well, one idea was really based upon something I read. They gave me a book on Notre Dame, and one of the professors had written a very unusual concept of the Sermon

on the Mount. I thought of a very dynamic, full-length Christ, with a very striking pose, standing on a rock with the multitude below. It could have been an interesting mural--I really think it could have been. It would have been more representational than the one we finally did. But I think it could have been interesting. It might have been a lot more difficult to do in granite, although I think I could have done it.

The second one was a processional idea, which was simply a movement of figures up against the whole tower. I had suggested there the figure of Christ with his arms in the preaching position, the disciples' heads cutting across his chest, and then his body disappearing down into the processional, as an idea. That was the one that they finally chose.

The third one was an interesting one. It wasn't a tree, but it was sort of like a tree shape, with limblike forms. I had groups of scholars on these different limbs. It was architecturally quite interesting, but I think it was static as compared to the one we finally did.

Anyway, we had a great meeting, and they all said that they really thought this one was the one that seemed to express the whole thing, as far as they were concerned. I think they were delighted that I used the figure of Christ with the disciples. Then I had a processional of figures that are not meant really to represent individual

scholars, but by the costumes to more or less suggest something of the ancients and coming up through the ages. I don't know whether you've seen it, but it has a flow of figures.

GOODWIN: Just a small magazine reproduction.

SHEETS: That's the one also that the architects liked. I went both to Notre Dame first, and then I went on back to the architects. They were very excited about that one. So then I came back and developed a very much more complete and better-thought-out design, twice the scale, I think. The second painting I made was probably five feet high, something like that. I took it back, and it was approved.

Of course I kept in mind while I was making this sketch what I might, within reason, be able to get in the way of granite. I'd already begun to get a lot of the samples. But then the problem was to really start tying these things down, and it took about a year to do all the preliminary work. When you get on this scale, you just can't believe the complications.

First of all, my studio was only fifty feet wide and twenty-five feet high on the long wall, and that little extra eighteen feet in the sixty-eight foot width posed a miserable problem because every time I drew it I had to keep moving the paper, rolling up one end or the other, plus the fact that I could only mount two sections, ten feet high each, at a time. In order to get a cartoon

that was going to be absolutely accurate, because at no time would I ever see the whole thing--no way to see the whole thing--I had to rent the Pan Pacific Auditorium. I glued together, I guess, the largest piece of paper that's been put together around here in a long time. On the floor of the Pan Pacific Auditorium, we put paper together in ten-foot-wide sheets. We had enough to make it 134 feet high and 68 feet wide. Then, with just the same kind of an instrument that a surveyor uses, we set up the tripod and set perfect four-square corners. Then we took ten-foot modules, vertically and horizontally, and used our snap lines to make a perfect grid of ten-foot squares all over the entire thing. Then we went over that with pencil so it would never get erased. It had to be that accurate. You just couldn't play around with quarters of inches. Then I took by measurement all of the basic lines in my design, and there were a lot of very powerful diagonal lines as well as cross lines and vertical lines. Everything we could do, we did by accurate measurement. We laid all those lines in on the floor of this big Pan Pacific Auditorium, and the cartoon then was basically established. The square lines and all the main points were very well established.

Then I took the cartoon all apart and cut it into horizontal strips ten feet high. These strips were all numbered. There were some fourteen or fifteen strips,

about 134 feet with extra space for notation and whatnot. We brought them back to the studio, and then I had photographs made of my sketch. I had slides made for every ten-foot square in the entire thing so that I could project each ten-foot strip on the grid exactly right. All I had to do was get it dead center on the ten feet, horizontally and vertically, and know that I had no distortion. It made a simple problem of getting a very accurate drawing then on a design that I never would see as one piece. I keep pointing this out because, as the process goes forward, you can see the complexity of all this.

When that was finished, I had all these small slabs of granite finished in the different textures that I wanted, arranged on a huge panel that had two tilted sides and rolled around on wheels. By having all these things in sequence--and I had a total of almost 200 colors, counting the different textures--I could take these colors and lay them against a still larger sketch, which was not so much in detail but was in accurate color. We took the original sketch and we took the granites, and we matched those granites as best we could and pulled it together that way.

Then we worked back the other way. We'd take the granites, after the sketch was completed and put up where we could work with it regularly without having to unroll it or anything, and we'd just take a piece of granite and hold it up to where it looked right. Then we'd take that

granite, and we'd carry that up on the scaffold with us. We had one row across at the top and one row underneath it. We went up to the top, and starting with each color, we matched it and even gave it some of the same texture as the granite, so it wouldn't look just like a slick thing. We painted every single area of this huge design. Of course, it had to be stylized to the point that you couldn't carry a color over and then spit on it and get it soft or darker or lighter. You had to have it absolutely right, color against color. There's no deviation--that's it.

We painted the top strip and the strip underneath it, and then we looked at that longingly and finally said, "Well, here we go." We took the top strip down, shipped it back to Cold Spring, Minnesota, and moved the bottom strip up to where the top one was and put the next one under it and painted that one. Strip by strip, we always had the one that was above it to match it to, but we had to do the whole thing without seeing it again. No, that's not true. We got it all painted, and by this time the strips were all back there, and the granite men had been making their analysis of areas: so much cubage for this, so much cubage for that. They got all their amounts of granites as these strips came back. They were all numbered so they knew the exact pieces of granite and everything else. They then started bringing granite from all over the world.

Well, when I got through with the bottom panel, I went back to Cold Spring, Minnesota, and we pasted the whole cartoon again, as we had done the first time, on the floor of a big gymnasium we rented. By climbing up on the grid above it, looking down--though I couldn't get a really good view way up there as I was only about oh, thirty-five, forty feet up--I could look down and get a fairly good sense of the whole design, and I knew it was working. Then I had Sue Hertel come up, and we spent three days there, where I did nothing but stand up on the grid, and she moved pieces of granite around on top of the cartoon to see if I could locate them against the color of the cartoon. If I couldn't locate them, then it was a success. With down light, there were no shadows.

After we'd done all of that, then piece by piece, we cut it up again, and the granite craftsmen started the actual production, which took two years. I used to commute up there about every four weeks, the year around, winter, summer, and we gradually got the project going.

GOODWIN: How big were the pieces, the individual tiles?

SHEETS: Well, they varied enormously. They're not tile--they're solid granite. I'll put it this way: we had to end up always with a piece of granite six inches thick, two inches thick attached to four inches of concrete behind the granite. The granite was formed into large units approximately 6 x 8 feet, irregular in shape, in

order to follow contours of figures in the design. Each color and value change was cut out of a separate piece of granite, whether two inches thick or the full six inches thick.

The architects and engineers and I spent several months determining the best method of attaching the granite to the building. It was agreed by our collaboration that if the granite was backed directly by concrete, that in approximately sixty years the difference in expansion and contraction between granite and concrete would separate the bond. Due to the extreme changes in the weather in Indiana, we decided we would not cast the granite on the concrete. The engineers told us to imbed stainless steel pins in the back of each piece of granite. Holes were drilled slightly larger than the pins, and the pins were then dry-packed into the granite. Depending upon the size of each piece of granite, the number of pins in each piece varied from two to seventy-five.

After each granite segment had the pins installed, the granite was placed face down upon a level surface and the adjoining granite was placed against the pieces that fitted like a jigsaw puzzle to produce the overall design. These segments were then covered on the back side by a plastic blanket one-quarter of an inch thick. The pins were forced through the plastic, so the plastic was tightly placed against the granite. A metal edge six inches thick

was then shaped around each area that I have outlined as being approximately six feet by eight feet. Concrete was then poured to the level of the six-inch border and allowed to cure. In the detail of Christ's head, that was five feet high, the individual pieces varied from twelve inches to several square feet. In Christ's head there were 123 pieces carefully cut to shape, and the surrounding shapes fitted perfectly to each shape. Each of the units 6 x 8 feet irregular in shape were fitted together, numbered, and made ready for shipping from Cold Spring, Minnesota, to South Bend, Indiana.

There were many engineering details I have not described to avoid sheer action with pins and to assure a perfect flat surface in the casings, but suffice to say the process was correct. The only maintenance on the mural will be grouting between the large units every twenty years comparable to the maintenance of all granite buildings in severe weather. There will be no change in color or value in centuries if the building survives.

Well, finally, when they had about thirty or forty feet of the full width of the stone together, I was really kind of scared. I said to myself and then to them, "How do we know this thing is going to carry a half a mile? I know my sketch, but I'd love to see a finished section of the stone." That kind of material was so heavy that I rarely saw two sections of it together--I mean two 8 x 8

or 6 x 6 pieces. They were scattered all over, and there was no way to move them. I could only look at a piece of a head here and a piece of a nose there. I'll tell you, it was a hell of a problem to visualize completely the total effect of the mural. So finally I persuaded them to rent some bleachers, and we put them down below a water tower. And with a 45-degree angle, we put heavy, very heavy plywood on the bleachers, and then we laid these great . . . .

TAPE NUMBER: IX, SIDE ONE

JANUARY 13, 1977

GOODWIN: We're continuing a discussion of the preparation of the library mural at the University of Notre Dame which was finished in 1963. We're just at the point where Mr. Sheets is in Minnesota, and he's trying to get an idea of what the effect of the full mural will be once it's in place. He hasn't had the opportunity yet to see it that way. I think that's about right.

SHEETS: That's correct, George. I think there are two points to make in picking up where we left off: first, the necessity of trying to see how well the pieces worked together, because I'd never seen pieces larger than 6 feet x 6 or 7 feet. I had not seen even a full head put together, except in a few instances. I also wanted to see how it would carry, how the style we were using and the values we were using would carry--knowing that it would have to carry for some half-mile effectively--and at the same time be interesting and exciting when you came up close to it. So for this reason we, as I told you, rented the bleachers, put heavy plywood against the seats at a 45-degree angle and had large sections of the mural set up against them. At this point, I'm about to climb up a water tower some ninety feet high. It's in the winter, and there's a pretty good wind blowing. From the ground it looked like

a very simple climb because the ladder was not too vertical. It had a slight tilt to it, and it had railings, and it went up to a deck. I hadn't taken the trouble to walk around to the other side of the tower to see that the ladder changed then to just iron rungs, straight up, for the balance of the ninety feet, some seventy feet. Well, at the last minute, Father Joyce, who is the assistant to the president at Notre Dame, said, "I'm going with you." I said, "Well, Father, you can't go in that beautiful robe and your tricornered hat. You couldn't do it." He said, "Yes, I'm going to do it." Finally I persuaded him to leave his hat, and we started up. I knew he was with me all the way because every time I stopped for a little bit of breath I'd feel his hand hit my foot. I guess his being there kept me going up, because it was a pretty darned difficult climb. It was so cold and my hands felt so numb that I didn't know for sure I could even hang onto the darn rungs. But we got to the top, and then we were shocked, because when we reached the top it was not flat; it was pyramid-shaped. It went up to a center point. It was metal, and there wasn't too much to hang onto. There were two or three little rungs as you went up, two or three little ones, and that was all.

Well, we were shocked when we got to the very top of the peak to see that we were still so far back from the edge of the tower that we couldn't look down on the mural,

so we had to descend on the other side, really on our bellies, sliding down slowly toward the edge and hanging our heads over the edge, which I didn't enjoy a bit. I've never been bothered terribly by high places, but I certainly wasn't pleased with the experience. Father Joyce, who certainly was a gutsy man, as far as I'm concerned, completely messed up the beautiful costume that he wore. It was completely smeared with dirt and soot from that roof. Well, we were overjoyed in spite of the fact that we were dirty and cold, because we could tell that the mural was going to carry. It was of immeasurable help to see it from that distance. On reflection, of course, what we should have done was rent a helicopter, which would have been a very simple matter to climb up to any height. But we didn't think of that, and I don't know that there was a helicopter nearby, but in any case, we made it.

Then coming back was worse than going up, but as you can see, we made it, although I think that descent was one of the toughest jobs that I ever did, because looking down and then having to back up over that point again and slide down the other side was more than I would like to do every day.

Well, that satisfied me at least to the point that I felt that the mural was going to carry. With the value range that I had worked out, I felt that the overall design would work.

Over the year or year and a half that it took to complete the fabrication, I made trips about every month and checked on details. Once the granite cutters understood the problem thoroughly, they were magnificent in the way they worked things out. It was a strange circumstance that the entire town of Cold Spring, Minnesota, is made up of Roman Catholic people. The dedication that those people had toward this job, which they insisted on calling the Eighth Wonder of the World, because of its size and the fact that they'd never had contact with anything like this, produced a dedication that was tremendous. It probably was something akin to the spirit that some of the cities that built great cathedrals might have felt, although there it would go on for 100 years or more. I think the whole city was aroused, and it's my understanding that most of the people in the city came down to the dedication at Notre Dame when it took place. But the interesting thing was that inch by inch, as this whole job was finished, there wasn't a single accident during the entire project; not one piece was broken. After the sections were once put together, it was extraordinary that they could be stored. I don't know off the top of my head what 68 x 134 is in square footage.

GOODWIN: I think it was something like 9,000 square feet.

SHEETS: It's about 9,000 square feet, and just 9,000 square feet strung out--even a lot of it outdoors in the winter

because of the fact that there wasn't enough room inside the buildings--made it look like an enormous graveyard, really, with all these pieces of granite all over the place. It was a very exciting experience.

When we loaded the sections to take them to Notre Dame, it was still wintertime. Everyone was somewhat concerned about it, although there was a cover over the outside and elevators that went up the face of the big tower. It was still minus-zero and only occasionally slightly above-zero weather. These trucks had to be loaded with two major pieces, one on either side tilted together at the top, much as they load heavy glass or big glass panels. The trucks proceeded from Cold Spring, Minnesota, some 670 miles, I think it was, down to South Bend, Indiana, through those icy roads. They arrived at the job exactly at a certain time that was preplanned. The elevator took them right off of the truck bed, and lifted them up to their place, starting from the bottom. They were welded immediately to the structural iron that protruded from the tower, welded directly to the building piece by piece.

So it meant that just as an army has to plan its movements, this whole operation had to be planned. A truck left at a certain hour to arrive at a certain hour, in order to keep the work going smoothly forward. They would then take each section right off the truck and up to its place. The right amount of time was planned,

between trucks, of course, for the welding, and this schedule followed right up the building. It was a continuous process, twenty-four hours a day, in the neighborhood of seven or eight weeks in that final operation. Of course, it was all done under cover. You couldn't see a thing. No one could tell what the mural was about.

GOODWIN: Why was it done under cover?

SHEETS: Oh, because of the freezing weather. They had the entire elevator covered with a heavy plastic and tar paper covering, so they could heat it. Otherwise, the men couldn't even have worked on the shaft.

GOODWIN: It wasn't for the purpose of surprise?

SHEETS: No, it was not. It was just there was no other way to do it. Then they did plan a surprise. They planned to unveil it before they took the elevator out. This was an exterior elevator, of course that was removed piece by piece as it came down with all of the scaffolding. As that came down, they dropped a huge black plastic sheet from the top and brought it down the full length. They had worked out a very clever device for unveiling this, having this great plastic sheet come down on rings on some heavy cables at the right moment. I was told all about the mechanics of this thing, and I was invited to come to the opening.

It was at the opening when they had a formal dedication, of course, plus a ceremony at which they gave the

doctorate degrees for Notre Dame that year. They awarded me a doctorate degree, an LLD honorary degree. But I was excited about the idea of this thing being unfurled and at the same time about half-scared as no one had ever seen it.

This is the way we thought it was to be when we started from California, my wife and I, to go back for the unveiling. We met Mr. [Warren T.] Mosman (who represented the architects in helping put this whole idea together) and his wife in Chicago, and then we flew from there to South Bend together. As we got out of the airplane, from California to Chicago, I saw the Chicago Tribune lying around on various sales shelves, and on the front page was my huge mural in full color. [laughter] I thought, "How in the world could they ever have taken such a picture? They must have put it together from the original sketch." Until I looked a second time and realized that it was actually the building. What had happened was that they had a small twister the day before the dedication, and the twister had simply taken the tarpaulin that covered it off into space, and they never even found pieces of it. So it was unveiled unceremoniously the day before by the elements. It made it perhaps less dramatic, but I felt better having looked at that photograph before we got to South Bend, to realize that it did read well, and it was a very exciting experience.

GOODWIN: What kind of feeling did you have, or do you

still have, about that work?

SHEETS: I feel very good about it. I feel good about it because I know that it isn't going to change. It certainly isn't going to get any better, but it can't get any worse because, being in granite, it's a timeless material. There is just nothing that will bother it. I told you how complicated it was the way the engineers and we worked it out so that there never could be any separation from the concrete and the building. The only thing that will have to be done, probably every twenty years, is to grout between those major stones. But that has to be done in any building in the East, whether it's in New York or South Bend or Chicago. The elements require a regrouting about every twenty years in a granite building. The granite itself, however, will never be in any way discolored. It's so hard and so dense that whatever stain would come on it would be normally washed off by the winter rain and by the wind and whatnot.

I feel very good about it because I think it does actually work as a mural in relation to the architecture. One of the most interesting ways to approach it is from the ground on the main axis. There's a long reflection pool, several hundred feet long, that extends almost to the entrance door itself, probably 100 feet short. From a long distance away, you get a very interesting play of the reflection of the mural in the pool. The pool seems to give it an extra dimension.

But the color is what I think is most exciting. I think it would be impossible to make bad color relationships with the natural granites. My feeling is that the color is very close to the frescoes of Piero della Francesca in the actual color harmony. You feel it in any earthen problem of course, but Piero della Francesca certainly did get some beautiful nuances of color that many other fresco painters did not get to the same degree.

GOODWIN: Is that something you sought to achieve?

SHEETS: Well, to a degree I certainly wasn't conscious, I think, of any particular artist, but I wanted as rich, warm, cool feeling as I could get, which I think he had to such a brilliant degree. He used intense color against muted colors, greyed colors, and greys and whites, which made the few colors that he used very intense and more striking than if he'd had a great deal of color throughout. Well, in this mural the big problem was not getting the color harmony; it was getting values that would be absolutely right and carry. Sometimes the value that you wanted to use was so close that you wavered a long time for fear that it might not really read. I found that the absoluteness of each color made it a very demanding decision. At the same time, it made it more telling than if you were working in paint or some medium where you could move things around a little bit. It had a kind of striking simplicity, much as you get in graphic work today.

I think one of the reasons graphic exhibitions are more interesting than many painting exhibitions is that graphics--just the very discipline of the positive use of color in a specific way, one against the other--is more striking than when a painter can fool around, scumble around a little bit more. Obviously one can't do always the same thing in one medium or another. But I think this material had the same effect. In a mosaic, you can get almost any juxtaposition of color by vibrating the different colors together. In this instance, you make a final selection, and it is so final, there's no way you can change it.

I really feel very pleased with it. I think that the people who go there feel something very unusual. It's not just the size. I think the size, of course, is bound to be impressive, if it isn't a weak thing.

GOODWIN: Do you feel it has a spiritual impact?

SHEETS: I do. I think it has a definite lift. As you know, I'm sure, there's a kind of irony about it. The football stadium is very important at South Bend, and this mural is on a direct axis with it. If you look from one end of the football field down across the scoreboard, what you see above the scoreboard is the very upper part of the Christ with arms extended. So the Notre Dame students immediately dubbed it "Touchdown Christ." They do that in a kind of a loving way, and they felt they really had

something, because they didn't lose a game for the first three and a half years in the coliseum, [laughter] but they finally found that they were not invincible. It was proven they were not.

But it's a mural that I'm very proud of, not just because of the size, partly because it was a very difficult problem in a new material that nobody had ever done anything with before, partly the fact that we could solve it and make it work and at the same time make it highly decorative, and also because I think it does give you a sense of the meaning of the teacher, the scholar, which of course symbolizes the library.

GOODWIN: What did it eventually cost?

SHEETS: Well, that's interesting. I think I told you earlier when I mentioned what I thought it might cost Father Hesburgh said, "Well, now we've passed that point."

GOODWIN: Right.

SHEETS: Well, an interesting thing happened, and I was so excited when it happened. They reproduced a photograph of my sketch in the alumni magazine, and they asked the alumni to contribute toward this mural. In the first six weeks, they had somewhere in the neighborhood of sixty or seventy thousand dollars that had come in. While I was in conversation with Father Hesburgh one day on the telephone, he said that things were going beautifully, that a certain great friend of the college, a graduate from there, a

lawyer in Chicago, had given the first check, which was for $40,000. The other checks had come in ranging anywhere from $10 to $200 or $300 or $400 and two or three for $1,000. They were coming in every day. He said, "We just have no question about it." Well, about two weeks after that, this same gentleman from Chicago called and said, "Father Hesburgh, how much have we got now? How are we doing?" He said, "Well, we're well over the $100,000 mark." He said, "Would it be a bad thing, Father Hesburgh, if you either returned the money or could get permission to use it for something else if I gave the whole thing?" Father Hesburgh said he was certain he could work it out, and this one man gave the entire mural.

GOODWIN: Do you remember who that was?

SHEETS: It was Mark Egan, from Chicago. I've corresponded with him, and he came to the dedication. He was so excited about the whole thing that I thought he was going to faint. He was probably in his middle or early fifties and a charming man. There's a very nice bronze tablet there that tells about his gift. But the final mural, you asked what it finally cost. Including my fee, we actually did this job for just slightly over a quarter of a million dollars.

GOODWIN: That was much less than your original guess.

SHEETS: It was better than $150,000 less than I thought. I had to make a wild guess because there was no way of

knowing. Of course, the reason for that is surely the fact that being executed up at Cold Spring, and due to the fact that these people were all members of the Roman Catholic church, and the fact that the people that owned the quarries were also Catholic, I think that they must have given a great deal of themselves in addition and beyond whatever they were paid. I know that Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays meant nothing to those people. They worked right straight through. There was so much experimental work that had to be done on this. We had to find ways to do it right. To carve the lines where we had used, of necessity, certain lines in the design, and to know exactly what would be absolutely permanent with which to fill those lines, for, perhaps, a soft grey line was something that we had to do a great deal of experimenting with. I just marvel at the way they cut, the precision with which they cut the details. I think in the Christ's face there were something like 200 pieces or perhaps more. I've forgotten. I get mixed up on it. I think it's about 200 and some separate pieces in the head, although it's not a complex head. It's very simple, and it reads extremely well. I don't know whether you've seen a good reproduction of it, but it reads very well. To get expression into that and to get it so that it doesn't look like you're just trying to paint, but to do it with the material, as you see in some of the great

early mosaics and that kind of thing, I think they did an exquisite job. They really knew that when I drew a line with a pencil that I didn't want it to waver around, because in this thing you couldn't waver. The small hands were three feet long, and you've got to get your forms to the point to where you can not only handle them in the material but where they will have some sensitivity and some feeling--feet, hands, heads, and then the gesture of bodies, and the whole thing. I think they did an extraordinary job.

GOODWIN: Do you remember how many figures there are?

SHEETS: Oh, goodness, just off the top of my head, I would have to say forty or forty-five or fifty figures in various kinds of costumes, just to symbolize something in the way of passing of time without trying to get literal or detailed about it. There's a sense of the classical and then coming on through. It's something that doesn't seem to mystify anyone. At the same time I don't think anyone has tried to tie it down into some very narrow meaning.

One of the most interesting things that happened was that I found, as I told you, 143 colors instead of only 27. There was one color that I really felt hopeless about. I didn't expect granite to look like gold, but I wanted something in the gamut of all the other colors that would have kind of gold appearance. Everywhere I went, I was told by everyone this is impossible to find. I'd been in

Europe on another matter, and I'd pushed this gold thing as far as I knew how to push it with friends of mine, brokers in marbles and granites and so on. I hadn't been home more than about six weeks when I received a little package in the mail. It was a beautiful piece of gold granite--I couldn't believe it--and a letter with it stating this had come from Brazil. The man knew nothing about the present whereabouts of the quarry, because he hadn't heard of this quarry. Well, I sent cables to South America and found out that this quarry was there, all right, but it had not been worked for over twenty-five years. I was told there was no way we could get any material out of it. Not being satisfied, I sent more cables and asked a broker in South America to see if, by any chance, they could locate a block of this material somewhere that hadn't been chopped up--maybe not a perfect block, but to see if they could fine one. In three months I had a cable that they had found a block, a very beautiful big block. We had it shipped to Cold Spring, Minnesota, and it's hard to believe this, but by cutting it the inch-and-a-half thickness, I think it was, which was the finest we used, we came out with about four square feet left, more than we actually needed, in the various places that I've used this gold. I mean, it's an uncanny kind of story.

GOODWIN: Was it in any way a religious experience for

you, having to do this mural?

SHEETS: I think so. I've always had a deep sense of something much bigger than life itself, something that hangs this whole thing together. I felt that in the spirit of trying to express a library, and at the same time some of the feeling that these people have, particularly in their Catholic religion, that it was a matter of real dedication. I think everybody involved couldn't help feeling that way.

GOODWIN: Has Notre Dame since had any large-scale art work added to the campus?

SHEETS: Not that I know of. They are building a beautiful museum there. This was, I think, somewhat stimulated by this big mural, and also by the fact that [Ivan] Mestrovic, the great Yugoslavian sculptor, was at Notre Dame for the last seven or eight years of his life. They built him the most beautiful studio, and he was really artist-in-residence, but he taught a few students sculpture. He was a very powerful influence on the college. He was terribly excited about this whole thing, and he saw the early sketches and was most enthusiastic. He died before the mural was finished, but he was a great man. The people who were in the art department and who were running the museum were first-rate people who had really strong feelings about building a fine gallery there. They are collecting some very fine things in many fields--not only painting and sculpture, but in primitive art and in

graphics. It's a very lively place and I think it's a very fine school. I like the spirit. We know about their football and basketball teams, but there seems to be a real air of dedication there.

GOODWIN: Have you been back a few times since?

SHEETS: I've been back a couple of times, and I enjoy it very much. I hear constantly from both Father Hesburgh and Father Joyce and a few of the other people that I've known there.

GOODWIN: Have you worked in granite again?

SHEETS: Not to the same degree. I've used a lot of granite as background, choosing a very strong, interesting value, a dark black or a brilliant, deep red or sometimes even deep green into which I inlay mosaics. Though it's hard to cut out and fit the mosaics in, I like it very much as a real part of a decoration. As I told you the other day, rather than the rectangle, I think it's sometimes much more beautiful to do this. I love granite in that sense. I've used granite in a lot of buildings. But I haven't done another mural.

GOODWIN: Let's talk about another project that was completed around this time, 1965, the mosaic mural for the National Shrine in Washington, D.C.

SHEETS: Well, that was a tremendously interesting project. I was asked by the architect to come to Washington to discuss the possibility of doing this dome over the main altar.

It's a 100-foot-diameter dome, and the spring line is at 100 feet in the air. It's a very powerful, big church. I think it's the sixth largest church in the world. I had no idea until I went back there what they were doing. It's called the National Shrine, the Catholic shrine, and just the nave itself is exactly the size of a football field, 100 by 300 feet. On the two sides, there are aisles that are probably 30 feet wide that extend on either side of the main columns that support the building. Then outside of those side aisles are enormous chapels, representing the different countries of the world. It's really an international shrine, because many of the European countries and many of the others, like Mexico and South America, have special shrines that their country has given. So there must be thirty such shrines in addition to the main church. The church was built underground, beneath the floor, and they called it "The Flat Top" for thirty or forty years in Washington. And they used the basements, what are now the basements of the church, for their various ceremonies. It was actually a church. Then when they started the cathedral, of course they have great educational facilities and that kind of thing underground. It's an enormous thing.

Well, this dome sits well back from the nave. In fact, like a few other cathedrals I've visited, it's

probably at least 100 feet from the end of the nave or the altar rail back to the main altar where the big baldachino goes up some 60 feet with the dome above it. They asked me to do the apocalypse concept for this dome, and I made a design which they liked. It has the theme of the apocalypse: the Lamb of God in the center, and then the great saints, which I formed into a huge cross. Between that are the symbols which are involved. Then in the pendentives are the various angels and whatnot.

It's a very simple design basically, although I found when we started to make the drawings here, we were again up on a big scale, thirty-foot figures, with the figures obviously being drawn for a dome shape, a dome volume. It's a totally different problem than working on a flat surface. Never having done a big dome before, I read everything I could read about all the geometry that was involved and did all the mathematics that I could get help on to work it all out to be sure that I was right.

Obviously a dome has a series of wedgelike shapes that also are bulging in the middle of each wedge. When you peel an orange, and pull the sections open, they're not just straight lines. There has to be a bow in them so they will fit the form. I made all the attempts that I could and finally worked out one of these forms, realizing that sometimes a head, half of a head, or part

of a head would be on one edge of a section, and then on the next section, perhaps three feet apart, would be the rest of the head. It was a real interesting problem to solve.

I was steaming up about it one night at a dinner party, the complexity of it, sort of talking to myself, and there was a young mathematician there teaching at Pomona College. He said, "Millard, why don't you come down and let me work it out on the computer for you?" So I went down to see if I was right, to have it verified. It turned out that we were right to an exact quarter of an inch on this first big segment. From then on we used the computer. It was so easy. He said, "I can tell you where you are within a quarter of an inch anyplace on the dome." He ran that computer for about three hours, and we had all of the figures we needed to work from. It really did make an interesting departure from the old way of doing it. The reason we had to be so accurate was that we had to send these cartoons--these final, finished cartoons--to Germany, where the dome was executed. The church wanted to let that contract separately, and there was no way that we could compete in this country financially, with the cost of our labor at that time, to do it here. I wanted very much to do it here. But I must say, they did a fantastic job. I love every bit of the execution and the way it was done in Germany. It was

quite superior to what I had been having done in Italy. I thought that in their technique they really did grasp everything we were trying to get.

The little sketch that we're looking at here in this catalog* is a flat rendition of the original sketch. But in the big dome there's tremendous mystery and the feeling of looking up into a pretty spooky other world up there. I think that Lamb of God is one of the best things we've done, in terms of its powerful setting, which you really can't get from this sketch at all.

GOODWIN: Was there any decoration there previously?

SHEETS: No, the church started out with the idea that inch by inch and space by space, they would move from plain surfaces to finished decoration. Now there has been another dome that has been executed by a French artist; it's a beautiful dome. They've been talking to me for some time about doing the main dome, which is 150 feet in diameter. That's down at the entrance of the church. But that's a matter of approximately three-quarters of a million dollars just for execution. So they're looking for a donor for that.

On the other hand, I've done since then a side chapel to Our Lady, as it's called. There are three

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*Millard Sheets. Lang Art Gallery, Scripps College, March 27-April 29, 1976.

separate rooms, three domes, and a side wall panel that I found quite an exciting job. It's a more intimate kind of thing. The main dome in this area is probably twenty-five feet high. The decoration is such an integral part of the altar and the whole thing the way it's designed that I enjoyed doing this very much. A group of figures move away from the crucifix itself, clear around the dome, representing virtually every race. It has a very special mood in it. It's something that I'm very proud of. It's more intimate. It's a more tender thing, yet it's a pretty bold thing, if you could see the original. That sketch does not in any way suggest the power in it. Then there was a lot of just plain, rich decoration in one other dome. It didn't have any figurative design. It was just real rich decoration. It was a lot of fun.

GOODWIN: What do you like most about working in mosaics?

SHEETS: I think there's something very exciting about a permanent material. It isn't because it's permanent; it's because it's ungiving. You have to work with it. You've got to create with finality. As I said, with paint you can move and push things around, and you can raise it or lower it in value, and you can brighten it or grey it in color. In mosaic, you make a decision, just as you do in the granite. You pick out a piece and you put it next to another piece. It either speaks to it and it's exciting and there's a richness, or there's dullness. I think that

mosaic is a wonderful medium in this respect. Also, I don't necessarily say "primitive" things, but I think I like things that are stronger in design and less fussy. I think that the minute that you work in mosaic or you work in stained glass or you work in granite, you're committing yourself to something that has to stand on its own without any prettiness or little pretty sweetening.

GOODWIN: What other artists in the United States are working in mosaic on such a large scale? I'm not familiar with any.

SHEETS: Well, there are many artists who work in mosaic. There are quite a few artists who do small panels, particularly in churches, and occasionally in a commercial building you'll see an example. But I don't know of any other artist that has worked in the continuous way that we have in our group because of the opportunities that I explained, through Home, and those opportunities lead me to all these other opportunities. I know that it's the reason that so many, many very big jobs have come to me. It is because people from other parts of the country have seen what we've done with Home. They've been interested enough to look me up and say, "Come do it." We've really worked on a national scale in this respect and had opportunities that have just been continuous.

There are some marvelous people who have done beautiful things. Jean and Arthur Ames did mosaics

before I ever made a mosaic. I brought them to Claremont many years ago where Jean taught at Scripps, and they made beautiful mosaics. They worked together as a team until Arthur died, but Jean herself has done some marvelous things on her own, though not in a continuous process. They'd do maybe one commission every five years or something like that. There are people I know in various parts of the country.

There's one company in St. Louis that I should have thought of first, a company called the Ravenna Mosaic Company. It's not in Ravenna--it's in St. Louis. It's a German family, the Heuduck family. They are the first people that I worked with in a mosaic. The first ones I ever made, I found out about them and sent my cartoon to St. Louis. They executed it and came out here and set it. I think they did at least five or six jobs for me. These antedated Home Savings. These go way back. I think they do by far the best commercial work, in the sense that they do not design themselves but they execute. I'm sure they could design certain things, but they have never tried to rival or to compete with the artists, to my knowledge. They've done a tremendous amount of work. In fact, they were the people who the church contracted with to execute the dome. Then they went to Germany, and they hired the German company and supervised the work. That's why I know it came out so well, because they knew me and knew

what I wanted, and I spent a great deal of time with them before they went to Germany. I'm sure if we do this other very big dome that they would work the same way. They're remarkable people. So there are mosaics being done, but not too many artists actually work with it themselves.

GOODWIN: You explained once how a business friend of yours asked how he might negotiate his fee with a certain company. What has been your experience in working with a project as large as, say, the Notre Dame library? What are the considerations to be examined?

SHEETS: Well, I think we talked about someone who was really getting into the business. Isn't that right?

GOODWIN: Yeah.

SHEETS: If I remember the incident, I think I criticized the thought that there was just an arbitrary figure he could pull out of a hat. Wasn't that what we were discussing?

GOODWIN: Yeah.

SHEETS: I think I said something about that he should go back and really analyze his own time and his own background. Well, now in a case like, well, like today, for example, where I happened to discuss a very interesting job. I know now, because I'm working in it all the time, and because I have my own staff, what it's going to cost pretty nearly to a dollar--obviously not to a dollar, but let's say if we're talking about $20,000, I know accurately

to within $400 or $500 what it will cost me to have this mosaic cut. I know how much time I'm going to give to it. I know how much time my chief assistant will give to work on the project. I know, of course, what the material costs. I know my studio overhead. So it's not a very difficult thing for me to arrive pretty quickly at a cost point. Now, from that point on you're involved basically with the kind of clients you have and what they can afford. Also experienced clients, people like those in many of the churches, know that there's not a standard fee, but they know that there is a certain area that the price will be within.

Now, I'm the first to say that we have ranged a great deal in price, feeling that at times we wanted very much to help some organization or institution or even sometimes an individual owner have something because they really felt deeply that they wanted it. We've done things for either little profit or no profit and even on occasions at a loss, but you can't do that continuously. We know pretty much what it's going to cost.

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GOODWIN: Without necessarily identifying a particular project, can you give me some idea of what kind of fees you charge for your large-scale commissions?

SHEETS: Are you speaking now of art primarily, or architecture, or what? Or both?

GOODWIN: Both or either.

SHEETS: Well, I can give you some round figures. Twenty years ago we used to feel that the average mosaic, to be almost entirely filled with figurative material, would cost a client around fifty dollars a square foot. Now, that has gone to pot because in those days we could buy the most beautiful glass from Italy, where it's made--most of the best glass comes from Italy--and we used to average about three or four dollars per square foot for color. Certain colors did cost like seven or eight dollars, but your average would hit about three or four dollars. That average has gone to eight and nine and ten now, for example. Gold that used to cost about ten dollars a foot is now closer to thirty dollars a foot. This is a simple inflationary fact that there's no way of getting around. Nobody is about to make his own glass. We stock better than $50,000 worth of glass at all times in the studio, just to keep working. So the old fifty-dollar fee for covering the labor, the design, the installation, and

all of the cutting is simply out of the question. Now, it is true that by careful designing, with simpler backgrounds, and then more definitive areas of decoration, we can keep it perhaps in the sixty-dollar field, but we're not set on any one of these prices. I used to get almost anything cut for twenty dollars a foot, and now it's about thirty dollars average. A person cutting full time has to be very good to do a couple of square feet on a head a day, because cutting a head or delicate features, that kind of thing, is very difficult. [tape recorder turned off] So that has made a big difference. Then the biggest change of all is installation. Due to the labor union control now, we cannot put up a mural ourselves. By that I mean I can't go out and hire the top mosaic setter. I have to go through the union.

GOODWIN: What union is that?

SHEETS: The tile setters union [Tile and Marble Helpers and Shopmen]. We have to go through the union. The setter has to have a certain kind of assistant at a certain kind of price. He has to buy the materials in a different way. I can't furnish the materials. So whereas it used to cost in the neighborhood of maybe as low as two dollars a foot to install, it's running now much closer to ten or eleven dollars a square foot to install. So you take the increase in the mosaic that I've given you and the increase in the cutting--almost every one of these

has gone up ten dollars a foot. That's not counting my time, which has remained much the same as far as the actual way we've charged. There is the designing and rendering, and then making the color sketch, and then getting it approved, then making a full-sized cartoon, then tracing it again for the cutters. There's a tremendous amount of time involved in it. So really, if I were offered a job tomorrow, just on a commercial basis, I don't even think I could talk to anyone under seventy-five dollars or eighty dollars a foot, whereas in my own buildings, we do it nearly for cost because of the importance of the mosaics to the building. Obviously, I've got to make the money then some other way--fees that I get for designing architecture and for supervising and all of that.

Now, painted murals, we used to get, as a rule, around twenty-five dollars a foot, for a painted mural done on linen and mounted on the wall, either before it was painted or after it was painted. We've had to go up at least to thirty-five dollars now because of just the increase of one thing alone, and that's the linen itself. The linen canvas has gone up incredibly--paints also, and even scaffold rental. These are the things that are so outside in a sense of what the problem is, but there they are. Basically, the fees that we get for the overall design carry the projects.

GOODWIN: What is the minimum amount you would work for? I know you make exceptions, depending on particular considerations.

SHEETS: I've done some of my best jobs for nothing. I've done a great deal of designing for friends, for people that I admire and like and know will appreciate it. At the same time, I have a very good annual income based upon the amount of work that I do. It's income that, by working those extra hours per day per month, has always been continuous. But I've done many jobs, like one I'm doing right now. I'm doing the entrance to a big museum in Lubbock, Texas, all the architectural interior, I'd guess you'd have to say, because it's a memorial to a man that I designed several buildings for who recently died. In this job I don't think I'll get more than traveling expenses and $1,000 for a hell of a lot of work. But, you know, you just have to do it both ways in this world. That's just part of my way of life. But I don't think there's a set amount that I would require to do a job.

First of all, I've found that you never know how big a job is until you get into it, until you explore it with your client. I think this is a terribly important point. Lots of times a client may have something in mind, and it may be very big or it may be very small. If you get really inside the project with them and their thinking

and you really analyze the problem with them, from your experience you know that they're either thinking in too big terms to do the job or in too small terms. You can give them a tremendous assist. I think that probably one of the reasons I've been successful working with clients all over the country is that I can get together with clients very quickly and discuss the matter until we understand each other. We have good ground rules, and they know that I'm not trying to push a project into something that it shouldn't be. On the other hand, I've told people that they're making a terrible mistake not to conceive of the job in terms that they must conceive of it to be successful. Certainly in planning architecture, without enough land, you're in trouble today, with the parking problems and with all the other things that are necessary. A building just shouldn't come up to a sidewalk and have no front and no chance for creating a setting. I mean, lots of times clients don't understand this. It's a piece of business property, and there it is right on the street, so why not? Well, sure, why not? But that's why our streets are dull and why our buildings are so often mediocre. You can't do much with them. By the same token, they get very extravagant ideas sometimes about space. They haven't analyzed their problems to the point that they know how much they can get out of much less space to create a building of much better quality

than they would get if they just built a lot of bulk space. I think this is a hell of the part of the responsibility of being an artist or a designer, and I feel that this is not stressed in school to the degree that it should be.

The word professional means social responsibility. I think if you're going to be a professional artist you have to look at a job not from the point of view of how much you are going to get out of this, but what is the right solution for the problem. Then your part fits in, if everything is fair and right. I think this is an abysmal lack on the part of so many artists' background in their training. There's no one that's ever really brought this to their attention. They get out and they have all sorts of ideas about wanting to sell paintings at very good prices without a reputation, without background. Maybe they have a lot of talent, but if somebody asks them to do a job, many artists don't even know how to start talking about it. The result is that the project is closed off because of their inability to deal with the problem. I feel so strongly that an artist should be trained in the variety of skillful ways, and certainly one of the ways is to know how to figure a job.

GOODWIN: Let's continue discussing some of your large commissions, such as the Garrison Theatre at Claremont,

which was finished in 1966. I believe you mentioned earlier that this was an example where you gave your talent to the colleges.

SHEETS: Yes. I think it might be well to tell the background of that theater, from the point of view again of how you face a different kind of a problem. It wasn't merely a matter of being asked to design a theater. Having been with the colleges many, many years, I saw many master plans presented to the colleges. I saw a few of them accepted and many of them never accepted because the different colleges couldn't get together, then even those plans which were accepted being ignored after about a year or two. It was a disturbing thing to me that people involved in education couldn't see through this problem and come to grips with the fact that they were having difficulties within their own family, and yet they criticized everything that goes on outside. So finally one time I was asked to discuss a problem with a special committee. This was when I was on the Scripps board.

I went to the meeting and found out that they were in great disturbance about what to do around the main library facility of the colleges, which was surrounded by a sort of a vacuum. Although the library was supported by three different colleges, it had no sense of belonging, let alone being a center. So during the

process of this discussion, it was suggested that I might see what I could do to pull this thing together. Well, being somewhat wary and having watched all these other failures, I presented it to the group this way: I said, "I'm just going to say first that I'm willing to do this. I'd like to work out a plan for this whole area, and I will do it without any obligation to the college, providing that the various boards are informed that they will be invited, eventually, to a preview of this master plan and what I think should happen in terms of buildings and so forth around this big quadrangle. But this is without any obligation. The boards do not have to feel that in any way they should necessarily accept this. But if they do accept it as a plan, it will be followed." I wanted it in a legal form that there will be no more question about it. They had a perfect right to pay me nothing and turn it down and forget it. Furthermore, they could choose anyone to design any one of these buildings in the complex, if they followed the master plan completely--not a style of architecture, but the basic plan. They agreed, and I did spend a great deal of money and a heck of a lot of time designing this whole area. Then I went to a very happy meeting at the California Club. The trustees lived mostly in the Los Angeles areas, and they met and accepted the plan. I made it very clear personally at that meeting, reiterating

the agreement on which this thing had been done before they accepted it. So everyone knew that that was the idea.

Well, shortly after that, I was called by a man, Mr. [Robert H.] Garrison, who said, "My wife and I gave twenty years ago, a considerable amount of money"--when $125,000 would have been a lot of money--"to build a small, experimental theater." He said, "I'm damned mad about it because nothing's happened. They didn't give us back our money, on which we could collect interest, even though they hadn't used it. They've collected the interest, but nothing has happened. I'm just damned mad about it."

So I got in touch with the president of the Claremont Colleges, the associated colleges' graduate school, and I told him. I said, "This is not the right kind of a thing, and this man's very upset about it." He said, "I know he's upset, and I don't blame him, but we've never been able to get anybody off the ground. We've talked to various groups at different times about what they thought would constitute an experimental theater. Let's get together with him."

We did, and he said what he wanted was a theater that probably wouldn't seat over 275 people and that had a first-rate stage where they could really do experimental work, and it would be available to all the different colleges. So the board then asked me to proceed as a regular

commission to design the theater. I had a great deal of fun working with different members of the staff and with, of course, the people who were giving the money as well as the college administrative people. I designed a small theater, and we had excellent estimates of the cost, which cost was going to be about twice what they had given originally, to do what they wanted and to do it very well. It fit into the overall scheme in the right way.

Well, they were practically ready to go ahead with it when they called in the two directors of the theaters, one from Pomona College and one from Scripps. Pomona College particularly just raised the roof. They said, "We don't want a little theater. We want a bigger theater. We can't use a little theater like this." So overnight it became not a small, intimate, experimental theater, but a theater that had to take care of about 750 people. I was asked then by the board to start over again and do a theater that would be both intimate and large. [tape recorder turned off]

The result of this was that I designed a theater that had entrances from both sides in the middle of the theater. By lighting the front part of the theater as the audience would arrive, they had an intimate theater of about 300 seats. Back of that, going up at a much steeper degree, there were about 450 seats. Without

even using curtains, it's extraordinary how you can make that into two theaters, just by lighting the front or lighting the whole theater. The price then jumped into five or six times what the original theater was going to be, way back to the $125,000 of twenty years ago. Mr. and Mrs. Garrison were extremely liberal. They gave better than half of the money, and they were terribly excited about the theater. I designed it then as a major part of this new plan where the big, heavy overhang in front would have been a part of a continuous arcade going the full length of that block. Then it was to turn and go down the other block and surround this library with an arcade.

Well, that was part of the plan, so we built it on that basis. We built it out of brick, which we thought would be a nice material to use in that whole block. When we got around to the idea of doing the big mural, which I planned from the beginning to do, I realized that with this tremendous increase in cost on the building and the fact that in the colleges that kind of thing becomes really an extra, I went to the people who gave the money for the theater, and I said, "I will design this, and I will execute it if you will pay half of the cost with me of the granite." We did split the cost, and we gave it to the colleges, the three of us, literally as a gift. But it made the building complete, and I really am very

pleased with those mosaics because I think they do symbolize three episodes of Shakespeare.

GOODWIN: Right. Which three are they?

SHEETS: Well, you have Cleopatra on the left, and you have Romeo and Juliet at the top, and then on the right you have King Lear. I think there's a scale there that's very nice.

Now, the disappointment I have in this job is the fact that at the same time we were building this theater, they went ahead, the same board, with a plan for the building on the west, which completely ignored the master plan. As a result, that arcade, which should have gone right on down the west side of the complex, is not there, although there is some hope that they will get money to complete that whole north block, which will be basically music, drama, and the arts. Their hope is to get a very powerful, big building for a museum and for the graduate art school and a music school in between. There would be a covered walk the full length of that block, though it would drop down to a lower height than the height over the entrance to the theater, which was always planned that way. It would drop down to about, I think, eighteen feet, whereas I think we're around twenty-six or twenty-seven feet high at the theater. That may go ahead, and that will help.

I also designed a chapel to go in the northeast

corner of that big complex with a whole new concept of a garden. How much of that will be done, I don't know. I'm not there to push it anymore, but we'll see. But that's only one of about fifteen plans that I've seen ignored. At least we did that one part of it.

As for people who use that [Garrison Theatre], they've had several professional theater groups there. For two summers, I think, they had marvelous theater groups. The one from England said that the acoustics are about the best they've ever found. Dr. [Vern O.] Knudsen from UCLA, who was a very famous man in acoustics--I think he since has died--we hired professionally to help us on the acoustics, and they are excellent. They're just marvelous. There is a full working stage, which you can do anything on. We have ample room for building scenery and storing scenery and all that kind of thing. It's a very fine working theater in that sense.

GOODWIN: I've seen the theater, but I've never attended a performance.

SHEETS: Yes, well, I'd like to get you inside sometime.

GOODWIN: Right. Here's another major commission; mosaics, I believe, for the Hilton Hotel in Honolulu.

SHEETS: No, that's a tile decoration. I was working for the Interpace Company, in charge of their design group, and the Hilton Hotel approached me with the problem of wanting to symbolize their hotel with the rainbow, which

is the symbol for Hawaii. Well, when I looked at the hotel and saw that it was 280 feet high and that this panel between the windows on either side was only 27 feet wide, I wondered how we were going to get a rainbow into 280 by 27 feet. But we made a lot of sketches and finally saw that it was possible to do this. I presented the sketch, in which the rainbow is treated in a semiabstract way, to the Hilton Hotel people, and they were very enthusiastic.

Then we had the problem of trying to figure out at Interpace what it would cost to execute it because, here again, we were involved in such a big scale. Again we rented the Pan Pacific Auditorium, and I remember that we came out to almost an inch in swinging those great arcs for the rainbow. We used the full width and the full length of the Pan Pacific, and we actually used wire, rather than cord, because there's so much stretch in any heavy string. We swung the radius on the floor of the Pan Pacific for the different colors of the rainbow, and I drew the rest of it in without any difficulty, just on a grid pattern basis.

But then the problem was how to execute it. If each tile had to be painted by hand--these were twelve-inch-square tiles--I knew that it would cost absolutely unlimited money. I didn't see how we could get the graduation of color, which we wanted; we didn't want

hard edges. So we went out and hired a group of twenty or twenty-five good art students from various colleges and art schools, and I brought them together, after we'd made this tremendous layout from which we could make tracings of each area. I taught certain ones to trace in sections. They were working on a space twenty-seven feet wide. We worked out techniques by getting the widest tracing paper in the world, then having them get down on their knees right on top of the tile which had been all laid out, and in this way they traced the design onto the tiles. Then we built a huge platform that we could lay sections on. We worked out a way of suspending fellows who could use spray guns for spraying the glaze on from above. We did this without any chance for corrections. Of course when you're glazing, what you'll fire out as red may look green when you put it on, and all the values look alike. They're all light. So we ran two or three sections and fired them. I remember how worried the various top people were in the Interpace plant. They looked at these things, and they said, "Oh, my God, how do you know what it looks like?" Of course, every tile was numbered, and here was a case where we had a lot of tile. If you multiplied 27 times 280, you have a lot.

Finally I was so harassed by these top executives that I said, "All right." By this time we had about 40 percent of it done, and standing on the ground beside it there is

no way to look at it. The thing's going to go up in the air that far, and you're going to look at it from some distance anyway. There are two of the panels, one on each end of the building, the same size and the same design. It was really a tremendous problem. Here, again, I think there was about $240,000 or $250,000 involved in the total project. The executives were worried because they'd see a little bubble once in a while on some tile, which will happen once in a while. Now, in an ordinary run of tile, you'd just throw that tile out, but in this case we couldn't throw that tile out. It would have been very difficult, almost impossible, to exactly duplicate it.

So finally in disgust, after I was pressured enough, I rented a helicopter this time, and I took the two top men in the company up with me. I'll never forget it. We took off up there in Glendale, and we swung down over the parking lot where we'd laid it all out, this 40 percent that was finished. As we approached it from a hell of a long ways off, I knew we were in. There wasn't any question at all, because the thing read from a mile and a half away. We came in at 500 feet, and at 500 feet it was simply marvelous. You couldn't believe how well it read. So we went up to 1,000 feet, then we went up to 2,000 feet, and that was the last trouble I had on the job. The people from then on were extremely pleased, and there were no problems until they put them up.

Unfortunately, the company that put them up were willing to pay for a supervising engineer, a ceramic engineer, for, I guess, the first two weeks or something like that. Then they felt that because he wasn't exploding every day with some new problem and some new suggestion, they didn't need him any longer. Because of that, they've had a very serious problem about the mural, which should never have happened. They did not completely clean the concrete wall behind the mural after a certain height up, and they lost quite a few tile. These have been replaced, and now they've had to go back and repin a lot of those tiles down again--which is utterly unnecessary, but they just simply got into the situation of being plain cheap when they shouldn't have.

Still, the mural is very effective. It's quite interesting from the sea, and when you fly in from Hawaii on the west end, you can see it for ten miles. Everybody takes photographs. Of course, you can see the other side from anywhere around the hotel and clear from the freeway. It reads very well. As a symbol, the Hilton people have used that rainbow now throughout their whole chain all over the world.

GOODWIN: Right. Uniforms and menus.

SHEETS: Costumes and uniforms and menus and everything else. And it was a lot of fun. We had some bad days wondering for sure how well we could control it, but

those kids were wonderful. You know, many of them stayed on. We kept them on and they worked there for years. It was good experience for those kids, too, because they had to be a part of a team, which was a totally new thing for many of them. That was the hardest thing for most of them to adjust to. They're used to doing their own thing, but here they had to be a piece of something that was moving, and it was very interesting.

GOODWIN: Let's talk now about the Los Angeles City Hall East, where you did two murals.

SHEETS: Right. This was again with the same company.

GOODWIN: Where is that company located?

SHEETS: Interpace is the present name for what used to be Gladding-McBean, which was a very famous California company. They produced Franciscan dinnerware and Franciscan tile. They merged with Interpace approximately twelve years ago and became part of a conglomerate corporation, which at the time of this merger was International Pipe and something else. So they changed the name to Interpace. It's a coined name. The "International" part was all right, but the rest of it they just made up. So anyway, when the architect asked me to do the mural for the city hall, he said he'd like to have it done in tile. Well, we had worked long and hard at developing this technique where we could fire all of the colors at one time. Didn't we discuss that before?

GOODWIN: Yes.

SHEETS: This was so new, nothing had been done like this before, where you could fire brilliant reds, brilliant yellows, greens, blues, greys or blacks and earth colors all at the same time. So I was excited about using the tile for this mural. I worked up the two sketches, more or less depicting the idea of the melting pot, the different cultures that make up our culture. I think there are parts of that that are particularly beautiful, and I think the overall effect is interesting.

GOODWIN: Does one mural have a distinct subject and the other mural an opposite subject?

SHEETS: No, not the opposite. In each one it's a conglomerate of cultures. I took all of the major cultures of the world that have been the sources of our own American life, from the primitive to the more sophisticated cultures that have come here, and I've tried to do the symbols that would be as clear as possible in representing each of them. To put it together as a kind of total mosaic of design was a lot of fun, and I think the color is interesting. It's real sad to me that the lighting, which is so necessary, isn't there because of the lighting freeze. There's about half-light on at night, and no light on in the daytime. It's set back some 100 feet from the edge of the building, where it's part of the elevator wall. All they get now is a flat light from way off, which is not a very good

light; and what little they get is less than good light because it has a little inclination to shine, whereas the down lights that were a part of the integral design, all hidden in the ceiling, would have given perfect light with no shine on the mural, and the color would have just flared out in a beautiful way. I hope it will not be frozen forever and that the lighting will eventually be done right. But it was exciting to do, and here again I had to use a lot of people to work with me on the execution. I think I must have had eight artists working with me. I had one man that did nothing but wash the bottles out of which we squeezed the glaze. It's all hand-squeezed from a bottle with a little nozzle on the end of it.

GOODWIN: Is that how the painting is done, with a bottle?

SHEETS: Yes. The glazes are applied by squeezing out of a flexible bottle.

GOODWIN: It's like decorating a cake.

SHEETS: Right, exactly. Except we had a variety of nozzles from almost wire-thin tubes that would let the tiniest stream through to some that would come out pretty fast for the big areas. With the techniques that we developed for bringing colors together, by putting on the outlines with one color and then filling between them with another color and so forth, we produced some perfectly beautiful qualities. The color itself is very rich in these glazes that we developed. We spent a

tremendous amount of money in research at Interpace, hundreds of thousands of dollars over a period of nine years, developing the ability to do these things.

Here again, after a very careful, very finished cartoon was made and we had very good color sketches, it was fun to see how you cculd absorb eight or ten people working and keep the quality so that it all looks like it was done by one person. It's amazing that people can learn to work together. And that's, of course, another thing I feel so strongly about, because it gets away from this continuous, egocentric idea that "I've got to show what I can do." There are things that are bigger than that, and we've learned to work together on all of these projects.

GOODWIN: I went back and looked at the murals a few weeks ago.

SHEETS: Did you?

GOODWIN: Yeah, and I noticed a few subjects that you had mentioned as being influential in your development, even when you first went to Europe in 1929. You mentioned how impressive the Avignon Pietà was when you first saw it, and I think that's in the mural.

SHEETS: I used it, yes. To suggest the French culture. What else? Well, I used some German Gothic sculpture. Sometimes I used people; sometimes I used art--anything that I felt would best symbolize the special cultures. I think the African figures are nice. I think that the

American Indian is all right. Of course, those are much easier, really, in a way than the other cultures. I like the Jewish scholars. Do you remember that particular area? The Chinese is fun. The Japanese is fun. It's all fun because I love all these cultures.

GOODWIN: There's a large sequence relating to nineteenth-century California history, with the pioneers and the Gold Rush.

SHEETS: Right. It's sort of our whole cultural background.

GOODWIN: While we have a little time left, let's mention the Scottish Rite temples in Los Angeles and San Francisco, which were actually done before the Notre Dame library.

SHEETS: The Scottish Rite cathedral was one of the most exciting projects I ever had anything to do with. It came to me in a strange way. The head of the Scottish Rite cathedral here in Los Angeles at the time, Judge Ellsworth Meyer, called me to ask me if I could go to dinner with a small group of people to discuss an "interesting subject." I said, "Well, are you sure I could enter into the discussion?" He said, "Yes, we think you can." I said, "Do you wish to discuss the subject matter?" He said, "No, not until dinnertime." Well, I went to dinner at the [Los Angeles] Athletic Club with him. I'd met him two or three times before. In fact, his wife, it turned out, had been one of my school

friends through grammar school and high school. But I went to meet them, and they were quite an interesting group. There were doctors and some lawyers and this judge and two or three others, eight people all together. They said, "We are going to build a new temple." They called it a "cathedral." I said, "Well, what kind of a cathedral?" They said, "Scottish Rite." I was a little dopey. I thought it might be Masonic, but I wasn't sure. I said, "Well, where is your old one?" I thought that might give me a clue, and they told me where it was, down on Flower Street, something like that. Then I knew that they were talking about a Masonic temple. They said, "We are trying to be very thorough before we go ahead with this job. We have met nine firms of architects, of which at least the principal men are members of our particular Masonry degree and also our particular temple. We've discussed the matter at length with each of them, and we've asked them for their idea of how they would approach this problem. You're the only one outside of the group that belong to the temple that we've interviewed. But we would like to discuss it with you. This is strictly in a discussion state. We're not deciding on anything, and we don't know just when we will, but we definitely like some of the buildings we've seen of yours and would like to include you in the discussion."

So they told me quite a bit about what has to be in

a temple of this kind. I didn't dream that there was a huge auditorium and a huge dining room. The auditorium seats 3,000, and the dining room seats 1,500, and they have many lodge rooms and recreation rooms. It's a city, a tremendous thing. They told me a lot about the project, and they said, "Would this kind of a thing appeal to you? How would you go about it?" I said, "Well, I don't think I'd go about it any differently than I would any other kind of a project. As a matter of fact," I said, "the first thing I would want to do is to prepare a very carefully thought out list of questions which I would like to present to you people for answers. You cannot design in a vacuum, whether it's a big project or a little project, whether it's for this kind of public use or semipublic use or private industry. It doesn't make any difference. I'd have to know a lot more about you. As a matter of fact, the first question I would put at the top of my list is, 'Why do you think you need to build a big temple? What's wrong with the one you've got?' I don't know anything about the one you've got, except that I've seen the outside and it looks horrible. But," I said, "that isn't the important thing. The important thing is why do you think you need a temple? Maybe the idea of Masonry isn't even practical today." They really looked so shocked at that! I said, "I have no idea, not being a Mason, but I certainly believe that you should really answer a lot of

questions. I don't think it would make a damned bit of difference what I think you should do at this point, because I don't know, and I don't think any other designer or architect could tell you any better, unless of course they're active members and have a lot of strong feelings, which I don't have. I wouldn't attempt to tell you what you should do."

They said, "Well, do you envisage any form?" I said, "Oh, no, I don't envisage any form at all at this point because it's got to grow out of the function and out of the whole idea of what you want." So they said, "Well, why don't you write us a list?" We had a pleasant dinner party, and we didn't get any farther than that, but I was happy to be included. I spent a lot of time then for maybe six weeks, five or six weeks--I know I didn't hurry--trying to really think out the problems. I knew the site. The site was magnificent.

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GOODWIN: Last time we began to discuss Mr. Sheets's work for the Scottish Rite Masonic Temple in Los Angeles, and he had explained how he was invited to a dinner to learn about the Masons' plans for a new site. Subsequently, he thought about their needs for a number of weeks. Then, I assume, you got back in touch with Judge Meyer.

SHEETS: No. As a matter of fact, I was very busy, and I suddenly realized that about four months had gone by. I thought perhaps I had frightened them away completely by asking them the twenty-five or more questions of why they thought they ought to build a temple. Then the phone rang and it was Judge Meyer, the head of the Scottish Rite. He said, "Well, we're ready to answer your questions." So we set up another dinner party, and it was an exciting evening. It was one of the really most exciting ones because they had done their homework. They had worked terribly hard on all of the questions and had, I thought, some imaginative answers. They were not in any way tying me or any other designer down, but they had some very good thoughts about the new relationship of Masonry to society and why they felt this was an important time to build the temple and why they wanted to truly represent the spirit of Masonry.

So without further ado, I made many sketches, I think three different concepts, which I presented to a smaller committee that they had decided would be easier to operate with. I think there were four people--or five, counting Judge Meyer--on the committee. I made the presentation of these three different concepts, from which they selected one. It was the one that we finally followed, but it grew considerably in the development, as most of these kinds of things do, both in character and in detail.

GOODWIN: What was their basic need?

SHEETS: Well, I think I suggested to you that I was surprised by the tremendous number of things that had to be incorporated in this temple. First of all, the upper degrees of Masonry are given in an auditorium, and they are given in the form of plays. They have incredible costumes and magnificent productions of the basic concepts that are ethical and have at heart a religious depth, and they draw from many religions, as far as I understand. I'm not a Mason, but I do feel that it's a tremendous attempt toward the freedom of man as an individual, and the rights of man as an individual, and respect for various races and creeds. I won't say this is always obtained, but certainly that's been the spirit. They felt that they wanted to depict this in every form. That's the reason there's

so much decoration involved in the temple.

The huge mosaic on the exterior east end of the temple at that time was the largest mosaic I'd ever made. It starts out with the builders of the temple from the days of Jerusalem, and King Solomon, who built the temple, and Babylon. Then it jumps up to the Persian emperor, Zerubabel. When the crusaders went to the Holy Land, they built a place called Acre, which is still a very important historical monument to the period of the crusaders. Of course, there were other temples and I showed Rheims cathedral in the process of building. I showed the importance of [Giuseppe] Garibaldi, the Mason who broke away from the Roman Catholic church because of what he felt was its limitations and dogmatism. Ever since then, there's been a certain quarrel, I gather, between the Masons and the Catholics. Then there is King Edward VII in his Masonic regalia as one of the great grand masters. We had the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace, which is part of the King Edward section. I think the final part of that mosaic shows the first grand master of California in his full regalia being invested in Sacramento. It's a kind of historical thing going way back to the ancient temple builders and coming right up through to actual California history, which the California sun at the top symbolizes.

GOODWIN: Did they initially want a mosaic for the

exterior or is that an idea you presented?

SHEETS: It's an idea that I developed as part of the building, because they told me in the very beginning, in the answers to these questions that they felt that they wanted to symbolize, in the same spirit, that law and concepts of religion were involved in the great temples. Certainly the Gothic cathedrals were the book for the people who couldn't read. Well, they didn't think of the American people not being able to read, but they wanted to show graphically the intensity of feeling throughout history toward the meaning of Masonry. So naturally, when I had this as a problem, I wanted to do something very dramatic on the east end, because that is an extremely tall mural. I think it's about seventy feet tall (I can't remember exactly); it's sixty or seventy feet high, and it's about twenty feet wide at least.

By the same token, the concept of the sculpture along the south facade, which I worked in collaboration with Albert Stewart to design, and then he made all of the models--it seems to me there were eighty scale models, which I took to Rome and had carved by a very fine sculptor in solid travertine. These were, of course, eventually sent back and placed on the facade. And here again are all of the temple builders, each one representing a special builder going back to ancient

Egypt and coming on through the time of King Solomon and the Persian emperor, up to and including George Washington. There are also Albert Pike, who was one of the very great men in the early part of the twentieth century or latter part of the nineteenth century, and Christopher Wren, who built the great cathedrals in England. The two St. Johns were interesting, because they were said to be patron saints, and they depicted two different meanings entirely. Then there's the Gothic builder, so it symbolizes the whole meaning of the building of the temple.

GOODWIN: How did you decide to work on such an enormous scale with those sculptures?

SHEETS: I felt that Los Angeles didn't have anything like this and there should be something that people would look at with a little different view than a typical six-foot-tall fellow holding a Civil War sword in his hand on a pedestal in MacArthur Park. I felt if we could get some sense of bigness of spirit, it would be exciting. I felt also that it gave us an opportunity, carving these figures in actual stone, to make a very dramatic presentation. The double-headed eagle, which was the symbol for the Scottish Rite, Albert Stewart designed, and I think it makes a stunning logo. We used it in four spots on the temple. Then all of the inscriptions which we did were carved in travertine, and the

different insignias of the degrees are all parts of the actual rites themselves. So it really makes a book to a pretty high degree on the outside.

On the inside, there are several sculptured and mosaic decorations on the interior of the auditorium. There's a large mural depicting the history of Masonry in California, starting with the first houses which were erected by Masons. It's all involved, and I can't remember all the details. There's also a large mural in the main reading room off the main library, which was not symbolic. It was the kind of thing I liked to do, a very interesting mood of some ancient trees, and it's a totally different type of mural. Then I did murals in the dining room.

The temple is like a city. It has a huge auditorium where they hold performances for the degree. Then there are four lodge rooms upstairs, where the various blue lodges meet to give the lower degrees. There is a recreational floor that has nothing but library facilities and pool tables and a combination of reading room and card room. There is a very fine library, which we had a lot of fun designing. There are, of course, the locker rooms and all of the other things that make it a tremendous, big building. It's four stories above ground and one below. There is a huge dining room on the top floor that seats 1,500 people, where you get an excellent view of the city. It's all under the overhang of that

big roof that extends over the balcony areas.

GOODWIN: I understand that the initiation fee for the Masons is very small, so what is the source of their wealth?

SHEETS: Oh, that's a good question. I won't say they are a wealthy organization, but it's extraordinary the amount of money that members leave at their deaths or give during their lifetime to Masonry. They support, as you know, so many things, like the Shriners' Hospital. The Shrine is another advanced degree area, but it is more on the social side. They put on the big East and West football games and the Shrine game, which support their children's hospitals. They have innumerable homes for children whose parents either die or desert them. They have not only children's hospitals but other kinds of hospitals. I believe almost all of their hospitals and their homes for children are nonsectarian. For instance, in San Francisco they support the magnificent Shrine Hospital for Children where it costs absolutely nothing to send a child, born with a severe handicap, there for countless operations. On the other hand, if a family is capable, has the money, they can contribute, but it's an astoundingly well run affair. Sue Hertel, who works for me, did a beautiful stained-glass window for the chapel in the Shrine Hospital. I had an opportunity to see the hospital, and I couldn't believe the

incredible things that they do there. It's one of the most disheartening things in the world to go through the hospital and see the numbers of children who are born with handicaps, but they are given the finest treatment there, and it's nearly all financed through the gifts of the people who believe in Masonry and its dedication to helping mankind. Many Masons leave very large amounts of money to such institutions.

GOODWIN: How long were you involved with the building of the Los Angeles temple?

SHEETS: I think from the time that I was first contacted until we finished the job, it would have been at least three to three and a half years. It took about two years to build the building. It took more than a year to plan it in the actual design stage. It took almost another year before that, while we talked about it. Including that six-month wait, I think it was almost four years.

Then I did another Scottish Rite temple in San Francisco. I worked with an architect who was an old-time Mason and who had done the large temple for Masonry in San Francisco. It's called the Grand Lodge. It has a huge auditorium, where many affairs other than Masonry are held. I designed the building, and his office in San Francisco carried out the plans. That is similar to the Los Angeles temple, though perhaps simpler in some ways. We had a tremendous amount of decoration on the inside

and a certain amount on the outside. There is a tremendous grill that had the great temple builders designed right into it, and we used insets of mosaics in the figures, which gives the grill a very exciting effect. The grills are probably 150 feet long, divided into two, with a space in between. It makes a very interesting approach to the building. You pass through this grill, then right into the actual building. But inside it's loaded again with a tremendous amount of decoration, all symbolical. It again has most of the same facilities that we have in Southern California.

Then later I redesigned the interior of the main lobby of the Grand Lodge. They had become more and more interested in renting the lodge auditorium to various organizations, such as symphony orchestras, concerts, and plays, and it has become the largest auditorium for that kind of use in San Francisco. I had to redesign the stage so it could be a combination of the proper setting and staging for the lodge, and at the same time pliable and useful for the other affairs. That was exciting. We put all new seats in, all new everything, and designed a great many changes in the architecture itself.

GOODWIN: The Masons sound like a fascinating client.

SHEETS: Well, I found them to be. My only experience has been these three instances, but they know what they want, and they are perfectly fine to work with. They

deal very directly. There's no bouncing around. I do admire what they do for society, because it's much more than a lodge. It's basically a thing that means a tremendous amount, I think, to an awful lot of people outside of the Masons themselves. That kind of covers all I can think about in terms of the Masonic temple.

GOODWIN: We've only mentioned some of the more obvious commissions Millard Sheets has done in architecture and mosaics and murals and so on. There are really too many to mention individually. But just to give an idea of the breadth of his activities, I want to mention also the topic of motion pictures.

SHEETS: Well, I've had a great deal of fun, really, as well as done a lot of hard work with motion pictures. I've never been involved to the same degree as most people who become involved in motion pictures, but starting way back in the early thirties, I worked for MGM and for Universal Studios. I worked on such pictures as The Great Ziegfeld. I can't even remember the names of some of the others, but I designed special sets and made sketches for other designers, too, which were then translated, of course, into sets. From my sketches they went into architectural drawings, then right on into the sets. Then later, in a series of pictures, I worked with William Dieterle, the director, and that meant traveling to Israel for an extended trip of more than two months, and there

was a trip to Egypt which lasted about six weeks. We worked on all of the preliminary work and all of the background material. It was my job to serve not only as production designer, but to see to it that all of the extras were costumed for the huge scenes that occur in biblical pictures. In one instance, I think there were 10,000 people involved. I also had the difficult job at times of going to the cultural minister, for instance in Egypt, and showing him a preliminary script which had been written for Joseph and His Brethren. It certainly lacked everything that Thomas Mann had in his book on Joseph and His Brethren. I had to somehow reassure the minister of culture, who was extremely well read on the subject, about the picture, and I had to have him place faith in me and in William Dieterle to the extent that they were willing to loan us the areas where we wanted to work, because we worked in some of the most important areas in Egypt. The only thing he said in a sense of protecting himself was, "Well, chances are we'll never show these pictures in Egypt or any other Arabic country." However, we were given full permission to go everywhere we wanted, and we had some extraordinary experiences--it would take too long to enumerate--but up and down the length of the Nile, from Aswan to Cairo to all of the great areas, including Thebes. We worked very freely. I had to do the research and make the

decisions as to where we were going to shoot, and it was very, very exciting.

I found the same thing even more exciting in many ways in Israel because of the fact that I had not known as much, perhaps, theoretically about Israel as I had about Egypt. I think in the first three weeks that I was there, which was before any staff came, except the director, we covered--and I covered particularly--almost every inch of Israel that belonged to it then: down into the Negev desert, up to the high mountains, going up into Lebanon. In covering this with an Israeli colonel and driver, we crisscrossed every inch of the country. I'm sure that very few people in Israel itself have had the experience of covering that much territory. I really enjoyed it. I don't think that we produced the greatest pictures, but I certainly had a real thrill being involved.

GOODWIN: On the subject of costume design, I think there's something you failed to mention. I understand that you did some designs for academic gowns at Scripps at one time.

SHEETS: [laughter] That doesn't really amount to very much. The girls were very sick of the typical black gown and black cap. The colors of the college, which were two colors of green, had been selected long before; so I designed a graduation robe in those colors which have been used throughout all the years at Scripps. It was

kind of pleasant to see that it could be done in good taste and simplicity and be dignified, but it was no tremendous thing. I enjoyed it.

GOODWIN: Did you design banners to represent departments and colleges?

SHEETS: There was a banner that already represented Scripps. It was designed by Lee Laurie, and it was really based upon the Lee Laurie sculpture. He made a relief sculpture of The Sower, a theme he used quite often, which is a woman walking in the field with a bag, sowing the symbolic wheat. We converted that into a banner and used the colors, and it was very handsome, but the original design was Lee Laurie.

GOODWIN: I think you mentioned that you also designed the official seal of Los Angeles County?

SHEETS: Yeah, I did, and that was an experience. Did I tell you about that?

GOODWIN: No. I'm putting your work in heraldry in one area.

SHEETS: I was working of course as the director of the County Art Institute [Otis] at that time, and that's the reason I was asked to do it. The Board of Supervisors were unhappy about what they had in the way of a kind of map of the county. One supervisor, Hahn, called it "a pan of fried eggs," which was not exactly a very good description. Anyway, they asked me to do it. I, in turn,

said, "What do you want to symbolize? I have some ideas about Los Angeles County, but you're the supervisors, and you have all sorts of authorities at your fingertips. What do you want symbolized?" I couldn't get one single suggestion, not one single suggestion, from any one of the supervisors. So I went ahead and made a very finished drawing, which was in color, of what I thought might make an interesting seal. I did it in an extremely simple way so it would read well in the distance and so it wouldn't look like a fried egg to Supervisor Hahn. Well, of course, the minute that I showed them the seal, they started suggesting all sorts of themes that might be added or one or two which might be eliminated. I said, "Well, that's fine. At least this is a kickoff." But they liked the arrangement of the seal: a simple cross form. They said, "It's just a matter of what we put in there." So I said, "All right, now have a huddle, and get your experts together and then tell me what you want added or taken out." And they did.

Well, at the time I was very involved with my own work in addition to directing the institute, and I had a young man working for me who was extremely credible. He wasn't always an articulate draftsman, but he was very good in many things that he was doing for me. So when they finally gave me the symbols that they wanted used, and the one they wanted for the diary industry was a cow.

So I said to this young fellow, "Look, here's my layout. Doodle in a cow, and doodle in these changes that we're making," which he did. We didn't even make it in color. It was very, very rough.

I took the design into the Board of Supervisors and left it with John Anson Ford, who was the chairman. I explained to John that this was strictly a preliminary rough sketch, and it was not meant as the final drawing. I didn't want to go ahead and go through the agonizing business or making another long-winded, finished drawing or finished painting, then have them tell me they wanted to change some ideas again. So it was presented on that basis, and Hahn, who is such a nincompoop as far as I'm concerned anyway, immediately attacked the drawing of this cow. And in nothing flat all of the reporters in the area, the Times and Examiner and the radio and everyone else, picked this up as a tremendous thing that the director of the art institute couldn't draw a cow. Hahn made a great speech about the fact that he thought it was pretty sad when the director of the institute couldn't draw a cow. So it came out over the radio and in the papers and everything else, and of course it made me very angry. I did have the satisfaction of telling Mr. Hahn what I thought of him as a person as well as what I thought of his intelligence. But in the meantime, they approved every one of the ideas, and I made a finished drawing.

Well, by the time that drawing went through the routine of the cryptographers, or whatever they call the people in the county who translated the design into everything from silk screens to emblems for the cars, and all the other uses for the seal--I must say it lost some of its original drawing. But I think the overall effect is good.

GOODWIN: Let's mention your work for the United States Air Force in Japan and Formosa. This was about 1958?

SHEETS: It's down there. [referring to notes]

GOODWIN: Yes, 1958.

SHEETS: It was the period when the Red Chinese from the mainland were bombing and dive bombing the islands of Quemoy and Matsu. It was a very dramatic moment in world peace, if we can call it world peace at that time, and the United States was very much involved. They sent a great deal of material to Formosa. They sent planes; they sent a lot of mechanical equipment and even a large force of mechanics to take care of the planes. We did no flying against the Red Chinese, but we kept those airplanes going, and we gave them, at that time, one of our best planes. They were extremely fast, and they were flown expertly by the Chinese flyers.

Well, the air force asked me, as they've asked many artists to go on similar jaunts, to go to Formosa and work at the bases and document as well as I could what

was going on. I did fly toward the islands. I never was close enough to be really involved with any actual fighting, but this fighting was going on, sometimes three and four times in twenty-four hours, day and night. The Chinese flyers would fly across from Taiwan when the word came that they were about to have another raid. Whereas the Red Chinese only had to fly something like eleven minutes from their mainland over to the islands, it took about forty minutes for the Free Chinese to go over. But they had this thing down to a pretty excellent timing proposition with their systems of warning and so on. The Free Chinese air force was really getting the best of it most of the time. But like so many wars, like our war in Korea and also, actually, in Vietnam, the Free Chinese themselves were not allowed to cross the line over China. Although a few planes were shot down, I'm sure, over the edge, the attempt was to keep away from the mainland itself and not cross the shoreline. But it was dramatic and it was very exciting to be in the midst of what was a war, although I was on the sidelines. I certainly enjoyed the whole experience.

GOODWIN: Did you do mostly watercolors?

SHEETS: Yes. I always work in watercolor and drawings when I make trips of that kind. It's so easy to carry.

GOODWIN: About how much work did you produce?

SHEETS: Oh, I think--if I remember correctly--I gave

the air force approximately six or seven paintings when I came back, finished paintings, which are in their archives. They have a very large collection now of paintings done by, oh, I would guess perhaps fifty or sixty artists from the United States in different combat zones. Of course a lot of it is in peacetime, too. It's not all war--fighting. But it's a very large collection, and some very, very good artists have gone.

You go, if you're invited to go, with the rank of a colonel. The only embarrassing part of that whole trip was that every time we got on an airplane, starting out here in Sacramento, I went to sleep in the officers' waiting room, because the plane was always a little late taking off. They would suddenly waken me and say, "You have to get on board before anybody can go on board, including even the pilots." Well, I was very embarrassed, but that happened a half a dozen times. I didn't go to sleep--I don't mean that--but every time we got ready to go on the plane, everybody stood and waited for me to go on board. I felt like a fool, but that was the procedure.

GOODWIN: In 1960 and '61, you were a lecturer for the State Department in Turkey and Russia.

SHEETS: What they really called those programs was the American Specialist Program. Unlike an ordinary cultural exchange, which many people have gone on, we had a program

where we exchanged similar people, people who had the same kind of activities. I was involved, of course, in education; I was involved in architecture; I was involved in painting and to a degree in planning and that kind of thing. So it was always very exciting because each time I went it gave me a great deal more choice and leeway as to where I wanted to go and to the people we met.

The trip to Turkey was fabulous. The State Department was not willing, in any way, to consider sending my wife with me, but I felt that partly because I traveled so much without her during the days when our children were young and also because if we went as a married couple we would have access to many experiences that I couldn't have as a single person. It was absolutely borne out in both experiences. Because of Mary being with me, we were able to go in and out of homes, meet many more people, and have many experiences I know I never would have had if I had been alone. In addition to that, she's marvelous with people, and I think she gave a very great deal of credit to our country by her spirit of wanting to know about and to get acquainted with people and to being sensitive to so many things in their lives, with women as well as with men. I know it was extremely important.

Well, we arrived in Turkey, in a very cold winter. I spent several days in Istanbul, where I lectured. Then I met and had discussions with people in the universities

on problems both in architecture and in painting.

GOODWIN: Did you give any demonstrations?

SHEETS: Yes, I gave at least two or three demonstrations, I think, on that trip. In both instances, they wanted me to paint. I didn't really do much painting in Turkey--I did some. But the time was so confusing, and it was in such a terrible part of the winter that I wasn't really well organized.

We went from Istanbul to the first capital of ancient Turkey, Edirne, which is in the very far northwest corner of Turkey, where Bulgaria and Greece come together, and it is fantastic. I gave lectures there, and we saw some of the ancient buildings.

One of the most interesting ones was a huge building for the treating of the mentally disordered. Way back in the twelfth century or even earlier, this whole building was designed to aid in the treatment of the patients. Water was used as one of the most important parts of the therapy. There were many ways that they had water dripping and water running and spouting in little fountains. The doctors maintained that it had a tremendous influence upon the mental attitude of the people they were treating. It was really a magnificent building. It had not only the main open areas, but it had beautiful courts, and the rooms themselves seemed to have been pretty beautifully thought out. So it was fun to see

that even that early that thought was given to the mental problems to the degree that it was.

Then from Edirne we went back to Istanbul and spent more time there. Then we went up to Ankara, the capital of Turkey, in Anatolia, the Asian part of the country, and it was bitter cold. It was right in the dead of winter, below zero a good part of the time, snow all over the ground. We met with State Department people and other Americans who were there on various assignments, as well as with a number of fascinating Turkish groups. We saw the great Hittite museum and other places of interest, and then we took off.

I had a driver come up from Istanbul at my expense, and we drove almost 3,000 miles. We went to Bursa, to Kayseri, and we went to Göreme, where the early Cappadocian Christians carved out and painted their churches in the great conical mounds that rose above the barren earth like enormous anthills, some as high as 200 feet. These huge stone mounds were carved into not only living areas, but chapels and refectories. It was one of the most beautiful and exciting places I've ever been. A stark lunar landscape. Then we drove on through the whole of upper Anatolia to a fascinating Kurd village and to many small towns. It was bitterly cold and deep in snow. We were told that there were wolves everywhere, which scared our driver nearly to death. Parts of the country

were really wild and the peasants, in their poor villages, looked as miserable as people could be. We drove through the rugged mountains and then dropped down into blossoming orange groves and fruit orchards where spring was bursting forth, into a totally different world. We came out at Adana at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. I lectured there, then we started on a trip that we were advised not to take because the road wasn't completed. We drove the full length of the Turkish coast of the Mediterranean Sea. And other than for twenty-seven blowouts and some incredible experiences, we had an exciting, beautiful trip. We saw ancient Roman ruins, theaters, and fortresses, and dramatic crusaders' castles, some rising out of the sea. We came to one city, Antalya, where the Romans built many of their warships. They had planted cypress trees all over Yugoslavia and parts of Turkey, and these were used not only as mastheads but as construction material for the fighting boats. There were two huge caves in this town, which they used as protection from the weather to do a lot of their work. They had a very beautiful sort of a quai built out, along which they could moor their vessels. It was an amazing place. We had taken a Turkish interpreter, Nilgül Matters, with us. She was a brilliant, young woman who understood and spoke English extremely well. She had been educated in the United States and had married an American, Bob,

who had come back with her to Turkey to teach, and they had two children. She became my interpreter, and she was excellent. On this particular trip we included her husband. We had been without any kind of decent housing or food or anything else for several days, and we looked forward to this particular town, Antalya, with great excitement, because we were told that there was a good hotel and food that was reasonably edible. We arrived in the town at ten o'clock at night, after I don't know how many flat tires that day, to find that it was the one night of the year when they had a great vaudeville show in the town auditorium.

All the people who could came from far and near to see the show, and they had taken every single bit of lodging. After going to the police station, we found that there was nothing whatsoever to be had unless we could get to the mayor, who was sitting up on a little ledge in the middle of the auditorium. All of us, and our gals particularly, were just worn out and we had to find rooms. So Bob and I finally went to the theater, and climbed a ladder up in the middle of all the people to this little balcony and, with another interpreter, explained our situation to the mayor. He clapped his hands, the show stopped, and he shouted down to a man who ran a restaurant, if you could call it that. He said, "Go to your restaurant now and take care of these

people. You stay at the restaurant; then, when the show is over, my wife and I and some other people will pick you up, and we'll see that you're taken care of." Well, it was fantastic. At the restaurant, all that was left after the big feed before the show, that we dared to eat, were a few hard-boiled eggs and some oranges. The rest of the leavings were just out of the question.

Well, sure enough, after the show, they came and picked us up, and my wife and I spent the night in the mayor's home, and the other couple spent the night with someone else high in their official life. In both cases, we know that they gave us their own bed, and they slept on the floor, which is real hospitality. We couldn't do a thing about their giving up their beds; they were so gracious and so positive about it.

Next morning we had breakfast and went down to see the hospital, which they were very proud of. We spent about two hours going through the hospital, which was extremely far ahead for its time and place. Then we toured some areas where there were ancient fortresses. We climbed the top of this high mountain and explored the town. When we were all set to leave, we were still concerned because we had no spare tire, and it was a long way to where we wanted to go to our next stop at the western end of this Mediterranean coast. We tried every place to buy tires but there were just none

available, not even retreads. The man at the hospital said, "Well, now, I think it's not safe for you to go without a spare, so we're going to send a jeep with a couple of people along to follow you and see to it that you get there safely." There was no way that we could pay graciously for all of this hospitality without insulting our hosts. We had no goods to give as gifts.

Finally our interpreter, Nil, said, "Well, I think the best thing to do is to make a gift to the hospital." So I went with her over to the hospital again and met the director and told him how much we appreciated everything. I said, "Just to show our appreciation, we'd like to make a gift." I had in mind something like fifty dollars--I don't remember exactly, but fifty dollars was a great deal of money in Turkey in those days. Being just in the middle of that period where I didn't see too well without my glasses, I gave him a bank note, which I thought was about fifty dollars, and we left. When we were leaving, he was very excited, and he wanted me to have a receipt. After much talk and much waiting Nil came running up with this receipt, which I put in my wallet, and we left. She said, "Do you have any idea what you gave him?" I said, "I think it was about fifty dollars, wasn't it?" Well, I can't remember, but it was more like $250. I hadn't meant to be so extravagant, but on the other hand, I certainly wasn't too unhappy

about it. Well, this just shows you sometimes that there's something else operating outside of yourself. We left the town, and the jeep followed us.

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SHEETS: We left about one o'clock or one-thirty, and at four o'clock that afternoon, a band of wild wolves that were infected with rabies just simply ran through the town biting right and left. I don't know how many people were bitten, but the exciting thing about that funny little gift is the fact that it was that much money allowed them to buy enough serum to take care of the whole problem for the town. It just seemed to be fated and we've been very grateful that it happened that way.

Well, we saw absolutely magnificent Roman ruins and beautiful cities along the way, many of them in semiruin. As we were driving up towards Izmir, we saw the most exciting processions of camels in the brightest regalia, with all sorts of people on foot and people with various musical instruments and whatnot going along the road all headed toward one direction. We finally came to a small town where there was a complete festival, put on by the mosque as a money-raising event. We found that there was a camel wrestling contest going on, a sport we'd never heard of before. These camels are incredible in the way they actually wrestle. The owners get them into a very high state of excitement with wild music on drums

and horns and by having a she-camel in heat tethered nearby, and then they lead two males into the middle of the field where they try to throw one another by forcing the head down with blows from their snakelike necks. They fight in full regalia, and it was a tremendously exciting experience. We stopped to explore Ephesus, then we went on to Izmir for several days of talks and meetings, and then finally we drove back up through the most famous parts of Turkey to Istanbul for a few more days, and that was the end of a fabulous adventure.

GOODWIN: How long were you in Turkey?

SHEETS: A little more than two months.

Then the other trip, which was to Russia, was a tremendous experience. We were there, again, in the dead of winter. We arrived in November and left two days before Christmas. I had the same experience, first of all, of taking my wife, at my expense, which was the smartest thing I could have done. Even more than in Turkey, doors opened that never would have opened in Russia.

We were briefed in Washington by the State Department for almost a week, and I have never had as much misinformation given me in my life. I can understand now, I think, why I was misinformed. I think that the State Department, as it operates in Russia, and the people in the news services are tremendously handicapped and held

down. Entrapment is always on their mind and every other kind of pressure. They know everything is bugged. Being a guest of the Russian government, we did not have this experience, and they allowed us freedom that very few people have. There were only ten people a year at that time that were being exchanged. I believe also that the particular thaw, just after Khrushchev had denounced Stalin and not too long before Khrushchev was overthrown, made it a perfect time to be in Russia. I was told that we'd never be allowed to go where we wanted to go. We would never go into people's homes. We'd never see the same person more than twice. It would just be set up so we wouldn't get really acquainted with anyone, and they said I'd never be able to give a lecture.

I took about 800 slides with me, hoping that I could give a talk, maybe with 40 or 50 slides on American architecture and 40 or 50 on the history of American painting. I had a lot of slide groups like that, in addition to a fairly complete résumé of my own painting and of a lot of the murals in the buildings we were working on, and then the two different houses we lived in--the one up on the coast and the one we still had down in Southern California at that time. I thought these would be fun to show. Well, they said, "You'll never get a chance." I had a little Japanese projector that you could collapse down into a small, about 4 x 6,

box. I could take that thing with a 35-millimeter Kodachrome slide and throw it up ten or twelve feet square. It had a great deal of power in the lens. I took the different gadgets you have to have to change the different currents, so we were all set. But the State Department said, "No way. You won't be able to do it. But," they said, "when the official asks you where you want to go, take a big, deep breath and just rattle off all the places, hoping he'll give you a few."

Well, when I did this, the man stopped me in a very quiet, smiling way and said, "Well, Mr. Sheets, how long were you going to be here?" We told him. He said, "Well, if you extend that three months, which we'd be glad to have you do, you can go to all these places, but in the meantime, where do you want to go?" So we told him where we wanted to go, including central Asia, and we went to all of those places. In that sense we were shocked right off the bat, right at the start.

Then we noticed that wherever we were set up in hotels, we were given very special treatment. We didn't live in any of the typical hotels for the Intourist. We had a fantastic, wonderful woman, Lydia Moroshkina, who served not only as our guide and interpreter but became a great friend of ours. She was a woman who didn't work primarily as an interpreter. She translated British and American plays and books into Russian theater

and motion picture, so she understood our idioms. She didn't speak English as well as she might, but she understood everything about our language and could translate our same idiom into the Russian idiom. So right from the beginning, we felt comfortable with her. We stayed in these very nice hotels, the Sovietskaya in Moscow and the Astoria in Leningrad, where they had it arranged so that I had a big room to work in, in addition to a sitting room and bathroom and bedroom.

Then they kept pushing the idea that I should paint. Well, from the beginning, I started to paint. Being in the middle of the winter, it was beautiful: all deep in snow, Red Square and out at Zagorsk, which is a great religious center, the only one left in Russia, I guess, where they train men for the clergy. It's an ancient, beautiful place, and the drive out there from Moscow was absolutely magnificent.

We went into dozens of artists' studios. I spoke the first time at the Moscow artists' union, which is not like our American unions; it is more like a guild. I was asked to speak there, and after that first time I met some of these artists. From there on we were just constantly being asked to give talks and slide shows, and I think I gave seventeen lectures all over the Soviet Union: in Armenia and central Asia, Moscow and Leningrad.

The people were so hungry to learn anything they

could about this country from people who actually lived there, that when they found out about the slides, my problem each time was they wanted to look at the whole 800. They didn't care about looking at a handful. If I lectured for, say, two hours with my interpreter--which, of course, is a slow job by the time you take time to interpret and show all these slides--they would ask questions for three or four hours. Then we'd end up going from the lecture to the most exciting homes. We would be met there by a dozen or two dozen people, with unusual food and drink, which they had made a tremendous effort to have. Then they would show me some of the works that they were doing. Some of them were working on very large murallike panels. Lots of them were just painting straight easel paintings. I was surprised and pleased to discover that a great many of them had very fine recording instruments, and they were recording, from the BBC broadcasts and from the American broadcasts, all of our best modern music. Not only that, they had libraries of the most up-to-date contemporary art of the world. They had books on practically every major artist of the last century. They were very much aware, even though they were being prohibited to do any of these things by their government, of what was being done outside. They were painting and not showing. They were hiding these things. I saw

a tremendous number of the paintings that they wouldn't dare show to the public, but they did have enough confidence in me to show them to me.

We were in Leningrad and then again in Moscow and then down to a country that I hadn't really thought would be that exciting; but I think that Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, is a fascinating area, and the people are marvelous. I met the most interesting painters there. We were through and in and out of the great museums, as we had been in Leningrad, where I had days in the great museum, the Hermitage. Behind the scenes, we could do anything we wanted. We saw everything. They were extremely good about it. We were in Armenia, I think, about ten days, and then we flew from there to Uzbekistan where we visited Tashkent and Samarkand.

The whole experience was thrilling, I think mostly because we were able to bring to these people--and we met all facets of life in Russia and these other areas--the fact that as Americans we were not warmongers, we were not out to destroy them, which their papers told them every day we were going to try to do. We had some incredible arguments and marvelous conversations, very openly. We didn't hide anything. If they asked me even what I thought of Khrushchev, I told them. These were not always easy things to do. Right in the middle of a

talk in Leningrad someone said, "What do you think of Khrushchev?" I answered exactly what I thought. I said, "I think that he must be a very important person in your life, and he certainly seems to have had a tremendous influence and to have done a great deal of good in your country. But as a world diplomat, I don't think that he's been the right man to send to the United Nations, when he gets up and pounds the rostrum with his shoe." They laughed, and it was all done very easily.

When we left Russia, a woman official whom we'd met at almost the beginning of the trip, who had been very anti-American and anti-us in particular, not only turned around completely, but she insisted upon taking us to the airport in order to get us through customs very easily. She said that we were unlike so many Americans and British who come to Russia. They smile and say nice things but go home and write dirty articles. She said, "You've said everything the way you felt it, and we will welcome you back at any time in the future." So we felt really pleased. I said, "Well, have you heard all the things that I've said?" She said, "I know everything that you said." So I guess they had a pretty good record of it.

But we were in and out of homes. We were in every kind of art situation. I admire a great many things about the dedication and the feeling of these people

about their country. Most of the people who are against communism have, of course, been eliminated, so they don't have a very strong group against them. They're very critical, some of them, of many things about their government and about their system, but they still believe that it's going to be fine because when the bureaucrats who are uneducated die off, they will be replaced by the enlightened bureaucrats and leaders. It's always only five years down the road. Well, of course it is never going to be that way. I must say they're so much like a cross section of Americans. They're very dynamic; they're extremely, extremely friendly, very hospitable, very gay and full of excitement about things. The only thing I really don't like is their government. I think the people are just as wonderful as their government is lousy, and they said the same thing about us. But we were given a fantastically beautiful trip, and I'm very grateful that I had Mary with me, because not only did she get to feel the experience and have the experience, but she opened up so many doors. No question about it.

GOODWIN: When you returned to this country, did you lecture about your trips both to the Soviet Union and Turkey?

SHEETS: Yes, I did, and a lot of my closest friends thought that I had really turned pink. To come back and say things enthusiastically about a nation that

everybody's been talking about as your enemy seems to distract a lot of people, and it seems to upset a lot of people. I was even shocked at the colleges where I had been teaching for so long and other places where I was asked to speak. I must have spoken thirty or forty times, in every kind of situation, when I came back.

On our return, we stopped in Washington for a debriefing, and I made a great many people very unhappy about the things that I told them: first about my briefing and how wrong it was, and second that I felt that there was so much good to be done in this program if they particularly would have people take their wives with them. Anyway, we came back, and to my surprise, about two months later, I was asked to come back to Washington and speak to all the members in the State Department--which really was a surprise--in a very large auditorium, probably about 2,500 people. On top of that, later again, I was asked to come back and speak to the board that operated that whole program. They gave me three hours one morning of their regular board meeting to discuss all of the ideas that I had about their program. There were State Department people standing around the wall looking very unhappy. That's the way democracy does work sometimes. It's awkward, and sometimes it isn't easy, because both of those experiences were very difficult in many ways. But I think that the

reality of our experience in Russia was something that wasn't average.

Of course, we ran into some very bitter things. For example, every time we were taken to an airport, we were given the VIP treatment and put in a special waiting room. We quickly discovered that in these waiting rooms there were newspapers, and there was a newspaper that seemed to be printed in English, Italian, French, and German as well as Russian. It was called the Moscow News. We quickly discovered that this was a digest of all the editorials and major stories of all the Soviet news. After we read the first one or two in English, I remember Mary became so indignant I thought she was going to hit someone. She said that this was the dirtiest bunch of stuff she'd ever read. It was so anti-American. It was so bitterly anti-free world and so full of flagrant lies and, of course, the United States was the center of the blame. From then on we collected these wherever we went. We gathered them up, and they were very valuable to me when I came back in part of my talk to show how their people are being propagandized. To a certain degree, I felt that our people were being propagandized too. And I still think we are.

When we were in Armenia, I had reached the point where I felt we had to cut down on the bulk of newsprint, so I spent part of the afternoon cutting out parts of the

things that I wanted to keep, and left the rest of it, because it looked kind of funny for me to be carrying all these newspapers around. Anyway, I didn't know who was going to open my briefcase. What possessed me I don't know, but I put a paper clip on about fifteen or twenty of these articles, and I put them in my coat pocket. I don't know yet why I did it. That night we went to a beautiful dinner party. The artist guild first had invited me to a stag party the night before we were to leave Armenia. They were so hospitable, and they said that they wanted to give me a party. So I said, "Number one, I must have an interpreter, and number two, my wife is with me and I don't really want to go to a party where I can't take her." So I guess it's one of the first parties where they ever broke down and allowed two women to come. In any case, it was a beautiful party, except it started out with a lot of very heavy, hard-liquor drinking and a long, long, long, long, long dinner, probably three hours of various courses coming along with wines. Well, eventually, after something like five or six hours, the man who was obviously the head commissar--the head of all the museums and the head of everything that had to do with art, a very powerful political man, a devout Communist, of course, who right opposite me at this long table)--arose. He didn't even wait for people to be quiet. I mean, he didn't

make any attempt to stop them. He just waited. It took that whole group about ten minutes to simmer down. In other words, he didn't do a Rotary Club thing and bang a glass or something. He just stood there smiling. Finally, when it did simmer down, he picked up a glass, about the size of a real water tumbler, and he poured it full of straight, unadulterated, high-powered vodka. He held it up to everybody, and then he set it down. Then he made one of the most beautiful talks about how much they enjoyed having us there, and how we had been the first Americans who had come since Rockwell Kent came in like 1925, and how they welcomed the thought that when we went back to the United States we would really encourage people from our country to come to Armenia. They had gotten a very different feeling about Americans because of us, and we, of course, had made very clear to them how much we had enjoyed them during our stay. It was a beautiful talk. Finally he finished, and then with a flourish he picks his glass up and he goes, "Glug, glug, glug, glug." He takes that whole thing down. Well, it would have killed an ordinary horse. He set it down, and then he sat down.

Well, I knew I had to answer eventually, so I waited about three of four minutes. I got up and I followed the same procedure, except I quickly went "Glug, glug," and set the bottle down and made my talk. I told them how

great we felt about our whole experience in the Soviet Union and Armenia in particular, and all the things that we would say when we got back about our feeling about their people. I sat down, and there was as much clapping as there had been before. I thought, "Well now, in about a minute, we can go to bed"--because we were going to catch a plane at about five o'clock in the morning.

Well, another ten minutes went by, and then finally a man way down at the end of the table gets up, and he makes another speech. Then I make another little speech. Each time I'm pouring one drop while they're pouring these big glugs. About ten or twelve speeches later, I knew I wasn't going to make another one. There was just no way I could do it. I had too much to drink, too much to eat, and I was too tired. So when I got up about the eleventh time to answer a toast, I picked up my glass, and I set it down. I didn't pour anything in it. I had our perfectly marvelous interpreter, who didn't mince a word. I said, "Gentlemen, this time I'm not going to make a toast. I'm going to ask a question. We've been here now for five or so weeks, and you know from what has been exchanged here tonight our feeling about you people and the people we've met in Russia and the people we expect to meet where we're going. You know that it's sincere, as I know that the things that you have said are sincere. I don't question them at all. But," I

said, "how can you reconcile the things that have been said here tonight with this incredible package of stuff that I've cut out of the Moscow News?" I pulled this all out of my pocket. I just felt it, I guess, is what I had to do. I said, "Here is just nothing but sheer hatred against my country, and I've selected some of the meanest, some of the most obviously untrue material I could find. Now, you read these, I'm sure, in Russian or Armenian or whatever language you read in, but I can't myself reconcile what's happened here tonight and what I read. Now, can you?" And I just remained standing.

There was about three minutes of dull silence, and finally this head guy right across the table stood up slowly, and he said, "Mr. Sheets, I don't wonder why you ask this question." He said, "Mr. Sheets, all I can tell you is that we know we are being propagandized, but we don't know how much we are being propagandized. This is our problem, because we have no way of judging it, except when people like yourself and Mrs. Sheets come here. These are the only experiences that give us a key to how much we're being propagandized. Please accept this as an explanation, and please do not let it in any way infect your feeling about us as people." Well, I thought it took more courage on the part of that man to do that than probably most people realized. Although I'm

sure he couldn't have said it in Russia, I think even there it was a dangerous thing to say in public.

But I do think that this is the kind of good that comes from this kind of an exchange. They begged me to encourage people to come to Armenia, and not to just complain about the bathrooms and food but to exchange ideas. Yet the government makes that very difficult to do. So it isn't entirely a matter of the tourist not wishing to do this. It's a matter of the opportunity to do it, and I think this is part of our great problem today in the world: to somehow get to people, where we have these frightening differences, and to try and get through. I really think it was a terribly important thing to have done, and I'm grateful for the opportunity and that I had a chance to do it.

GOODWIN: I understand, to shift to another subject, that you've been active in Republican party politics.

SHEETS: Not really. At one time I agreed to be a delegate to the Republican party [convention], and at that time the man that I had agreed to be a delegate for was not given the nomination, so I never became a delegate. As a matter of fact, it was the time that Nelson Rockefeller ran against the man who had the greatest loss of any Republican, from Phoenix, from Arizona.

GOODWIN: Oh, Goldwater.

SHEETS: Goldwater. It was 1964, the year that Goldwater

won the nomination over Rockefeller. So I never really was a delegate.

GOODWIN: You were supporting Rockefeller?

SHEETS: I was supporting Rockefeller. Not because of any tremendous, great depth of feeling, but I felt that being a more liberal person, I could support him more than I could Goldwater. Maybe it was the wrong choice. The country decided it wasn't the wrong choice, but in any case that was what happened. I've never been active. I've never given great amounts of money at any time to the Republican party. I've voted probably for more Democratic candidates than I've voted for Republican candidates over the years that I've voted all of my life, because I vote for the man. But I do have convictions about some of the basic ideas about conservatism in economics that I believe are the only sensible ways to run an operation. Yet I certainly believe in the social convictions that the Democrats have appeared to stand for more often. I think the Republicans have very often stood for these things but haven't been very adroit at presenting their own position without sounding like "me too." I don't think any of these politicians have really hit the center somewhere, which they should.

GOODWIN: Let's now discuss the Virginia Steele Scott Foundation, of which you're a trustee.

SHEETS: Well, that's a very real responsibility and

something I have become thoroughly involved with since the death of Mrs. Scott. My wife and I have been friends of Virginia Scott for thirty-five or more years, with her and her husband. As you probably know, she had a very serious cancer operation about eighteen years ago, from which she had a difficult time recovering her whole sense of where she was. They operated on the roof of her mouth, and she became almost inarticulate. She could not talk easily. Unfortunately, being a very sensitive person, she literally locked herself in a shell. She wouldn't go out to see people. All of us who had been very close friends were just simply locked out of her existence. Tragically, it eventually separated her from her husband. He evidently felt he couldn't live in that situation any longer, and they were separated and divorced. Then after a long illness, and difficulties because of many problems which I won't go into, she recovered to the degree that she became tremendously involved again in collecting and in being interested in supporting art.

For years before her illness she had wanted to get a new museum built in Pasadena. So when she regained her health and she had taken enough therapy so she could speak well enough to be comfortable, she and her mother were the first people who gave the money toward the new Pasadena Museum [of Modern Art]. They gave the first million and a half dollars, which made it very much easier to get

the rest of the money, as is always the case. After a while she realized that the people who had really taken over the reins of the museum--and I mean by that the local people who not only were pushing a certain area of art but had real control of it through their board of governors--she felt that they weren't headed at all in the direction that she had always been interested in for a museum. As you know, they made it into the Pasadena Museum of Modern Art, which they ran for not quite four years until it became bankrupt.

Well, it was during that period that she simply turned her back on the museum and decided to build her own gallery. She made the mistake of building this gallery in the middle of a private residential area and on a private street. Well, the gallery is a beautiful gallery. It was designed by Thornton Ladd and Associates with her as the guiding spirit, and most of it is underground. You enter the gallery from an elevator in the library of her home next door. It goes down, and then you go through a series of some twelve or thirteen galleries and come up into an atrium that is two stories high. It goes right up above the ground, with a lovely-looking house built at ground level over the lower galleries, which provides more gallery space and living quarters. It's a beautiful, beautiful gallery. It's on about four acres of land beautifully situated on the

knoll of a hill. There is lovely landscaping.

While she was building the gallery, she asked me to become a member of her foundation board. She didn't go into any detail at all as to what the board was to do or what the foundation was to accomplish or what kind of financing would back the foundation. When I saw her failing, rather rapidly, during the last six or so months of her life, I insisted that she call a board meeting--which she had never done--to delineate her sense of what the board should do if anything happened to her. She at first was unwilling to do this. She said, "I want the board to do any damn thing they want to do. I don't want to put any strings on it." I said, "Virginia, that's not fair. You know that I'm the only one on the board that has had background in art, and that to simply say let the board do what they want to do without the board having some real sense of your philosophy and your faith and so forth is wrong."

Well, finally, to cut a long story short, I helped her write an agenda, which she completely approved of, and the idea was to major in American art and to have as fine a collection as we could possibly get on the West Coast. We would do this out of income over a period of time. Then very abruptly she died, just one day before the day of the first board meeting she had called. Fortunately her secretary had taken down everything that had

been discussed, and I had my notes, so we were able to have the board meeting with some sense of her being there and her agreement on what we were planning.

Well, we were shocked when we found that the neighbors themselves objected strenuously to our bringing in even the same numbers of people that Mrs. Scott would have been able to bring in quite naturally with no problems whatsoever as a private gallery. But the fact that it became a foundation gave them the legal right to interfere, which they certainly did. We cannot even bring what we had planned at the outside, a hundred people a week, in small groups, by invitation and by appointment. So we turned completely toward developing our collection with the idea that, eventually, we will build a new museum, a new gallery, that will be open in a place where the public can come quite easily.

At first we thought we would buy out of income, and it turned out to be a very large foundation, large to me at least, some $14 million, including the property and including the things that she had already collected. We found that there were two reasons why we should perhaps not try to do this out of income, the first reason being probably the most valid: that American art has become a tremendously important thing in the collecting world today, not only because of American museums and private collectors but because investors from Europe are buying

it. We've been shocked by the fact in this year and a half that I've been buying paintings to discover that the Swiss and the Germans and the French dealers, as well as other collectors, have been buying, in an amazing way, the top things that they can get their hands on. The supply of modern French art, and the supply of the old masters, between being frozen by their various countries and the tremendous prices of modern French, makes it impossible to go into those areas. The few things available today are mostly exchanged back and forth among top private collectors. So it's strange that some of the same people who have been collecting European pictures are now buying the great American paintings as securities and investments. So because of this and the fact that inflation will outrun you in terms of the cost of the paintings going up and the value of the dollar falling, we felt and we have been advised that we should go ahead and buy out of capital, which we're doing now. At this point, we have seventy-one great American paintings.

GOODWIN: And your goal is about a hundred?

SHEETS: We hope to have somewhere between the seventy-one and a hundred. It could be ninety or it could be ninety-five or it could be a hundred. However, what I'm looking for and what the board has agreed definitely to accomplish is to find the great paintings that are

the stepping-stones in the development of what you could really call American art. We are starting with a [John Singleton] Copley, that is an American Copley painted before he went to England, where there's a certain native feeling that didn't occur in his English pictures. The same thing, of course, with Gilbert Stuart, Ralph Earl, and some of the early portrait painters, who are very unique in the fact that there is a kind of American quality that we want and have found. Then when we come on down through the whole eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it isn't too hard to select those who are the forerunners, who really are the leaders of movements through landscape areas, through the portrait areas, and the genre painters. Fortunately we've been able to get really very, very fine, high-quality examples of the artists that we've collected. We're still missing some very important ones.

GOODWIN: How far chronologically will the collection go?

SHEETS: Chronologically, we had decided roughly to stop somewhere between 1920 and 1930. In one or two instances, we've come beyond that, but basically that is the area that we're trying to stay within. We know that over a period of time in the future there will be enough influence of this foundation and the groups that we are going to build as supporting groups to continue to collect the contemporary thing, the contemporary qualities that can

be added in painting, hopefully in sculpture, and certainly in the graphics to eventually have a very large lending library from which universities, colleges, and even museums can borrow things. We expect to have an ongoing exhibition program in our new galleries or museum where we can show three or four major exhibitions a year of various aspects of American painting, sometimes the greatest older masters and at times very contemporary things, but on a high level, so that whenever anyone goes to the gallery, they'll know that they're going to see something that is really very fine and worthwhile and that the main collection will never become static. That's where we are, and I think it's particularly exciting because we're going to be within, I think, two years of building our museum. We have several, at least three, major possibilities where we can go. This is being worked out now, the final decisions and all of the legal matters that have to be gone through.

GOODWIN: You want to become affiliated with an existing institution?

SHEETS: Quite possibly, but in a very free sense at the same time, which is, I think, possible to do.

GOODWIN: We have just a few more minutes left on the tape here, but let's talk about one other aspect of your work, which is related to the Scott Foundation. At one time you served in the capacity of dealer, I believe,

for Bullock's Department Store.

SHEETS: Well, I was not exactly a dealer; I was a purchaser.

GOODWIN: A purchaser.

SHEETS: Right. I went to Europe, I've forgotten the year now, for Bullock's Department Stores, which by that time, of course, belonged to the Federated Department Stores. They asked me to buy contemporary art or perhaps back, in some cases, fifty, seventy-five years, paintings from England, Scotland, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, for a special traveling show that would open in the Pasadena Bullock's and then travel through a series of Bullock's stores throughout Southern California. This would be shown so that the public could buy things that had been selected for quality at a great range of prices. I think they were as low as probably fifteen or twenty or thirty dollars, in the case of certain prints, up to paintings that were worth a few thousand dollars. It was exciting to do this because I realized that it wasn't the first time that it had been done. Vincent Price had worked for Sears for a year or two before that and had done a very good job raising the Sears image by having such shows. Bullock's felt that it was a service, more than just competition, a service that they ought to perform, a large cut, certainly, above their gift shop and that kind of thing. I really had a great deal of

fun doing this, but it was hard work. I would go to a city, having made all the arrangements ahead, of course. I had been to Europe just a few weeks before on a trip of my own, and I had made arrangements with one of the top London galleries to have a large group of artists whose work I had selected by name, knowing their work, bring their things into this collection point, where I looked at them and bought freely from the things that were there.

GOODWIN: Kind of like being a juror?

SHEETS: It's just exactly like being a juror, you bet. That's why I said purchaser rather than a dealer because I had nothing to do with the dealing end of it--except perhaps in the sense that I did price everything where I thought it belonged. I didn't have someone telling me that they should put a price on a thing that I didn't think belonged. I bought some things that were very reasonable that I put a much higher price on because I thought they were worth it. Other things I kept very close to the original purchase price because, although they had to have a certain markup, it wasn't exorbitant. I was followed along by one of the Bullock's buyers, who paid the bills and saw to the shipping and all that kind of thing. I can't remember now, but it seems to me I bought around 900 works totally. It ranged from Rembrandt etchings to a few pretty serious paintings, pretty

important paintings. That was another interesting experience because I learned a great deal about the public. Things that I thought were going to be sure-fire, either because of price or because of the fact that we didn't get enough real art collectors, the works just didn't sell rapidly enough. There were many people at the first opening days of each of these shows. But there were not too many actually buying. It's my understanding, although I'm not sure of this, that after the main exhibitions were over, they gave the University of California at Los Angeles a choice of anything they wanted from its art collection. I believe a great many fine things went to UCLA, but I'm not sure about that. I believe the company made a large profit on the investment.

GOODWIN: In any event, the idea didn't catch on or you weren't interested in continuing?

SHEETS: The Federated Department Stores of America bought Bullock's just about the time that this first project was launched. Being a very large, national organization and having a much lower price range compared to the Bullock's high price range, they didn't feel, for whatever reason, like they wanted to do the second show, which was to be an American show. Then, as is so often the case, the two top people who were behind this at Bullock's died. It just seemed to disappear.

TAPE NUMBER: XI [video session]

FEBRUARY 5, 1977 and FEBRUARY 9, 1977

GOODWIN: Today is February 5, 1977, and this is George Goodwin at the home of Millard and Mary Sheets in Mendocino County, California. Their home is called Barking Rocks, and it's near a little settlement called Anchor Bay, California. We're about 150 miles north of San Francisco?

SHEETS: One hundred thirty-five.

GOODWIN: One hundred thirty-five. You've been living here since 1960?

SHEETS: That's right.

GOODWIN: What led you up here, away from Southern California?

SHEETS: Well, we'd always wanted a place on the sea. In the early days we searched every part of Southern California hoping that we could find what we were looking for. I'm afraid in those days everything we found we couldn't afford, and then by the time we were able to get what we wanted, this was the nearest place to Southern California. We found it on a trip one time as we turned a corner and saw these islands and decided this was where we wanted to live.

GOODWIN: About how much property do you have here?

SHEETS: There's seven acres where the house is located, and then we have a mile and a quarter of coastline, which

starts a quarter of a mile away, that we bought as an investment and a place to enjoy. It's a very famous point called Haven's Neck.

* * *

GOODWIN: Here we are in the main gallery of Barking Rocks, where we're seeing a large number and a great variety of art objects, but primarily sculpture. We're starting at the south end, I believe, and moving northward. We just looked at an example of Roman art, I believe.

SHEETS: That's right. That was a piece of sculpture that I got in Turkey many, many years ago, and that was a Greek icon we just passed. The reason there are so many different kinds of objects in this gallery is the fact that I like art, period. I have enjoyed traveling immensely and I collect as I go. This is to me a very exciting twelfth-century German Gothic sculpture that I've had for a long time. It's something that has lived very well. The color is beautiful, I think, in the patina of this figure. In placing it next to the figure we're going to see, carved by a Tarascan Indian in probably the eighteenth century near Lake Pátzcuaro, you get an interesting expression, I think, of great feeling in both instances of the spirit of the Christo, but done in a totally different manner: one in a very

refined manner, very sophisticated carving, the other in very primitive carving. That's a little penitente figure from New Mexico. As we've discussed before, George, a collector never owns anything. You pay well for the privilege of having nice people around to talk to, but of course they outlast you, which, I think, is the most exciting thing about collecting. You've had a hand in protecting beautiful things for a period of time. I feel no sense of possession. I just enjoy so much meeting some of the great minds of all time as I look at various kinds of art.

GOODWIN: Now, here's a rare painting. It's a Millard Sheets. [Arizona Mission] [laughter]

SHEETS: Well, this is here only for one reason. A friend of mine knew that I liked this painting, representing a certain period of about almost thirty years ago. When he had an opportunity to purchase it, he bought it and gave it to me as a present. I feel obligated to hang it in the gallery. Otherwise, I'm sure it wouldn't be there.

GOODWIN: We're now beginning to enter the particular strength of the collection, which is obviously pre-Columbian art. How long have you been active in the pre-Columbian field?

SHEETS: About forty years. Again on this table, which we're passing rapidly, you have things that go back to

the Tlatilco period. You have Colima. There is a Nayarit figure, and the pot in the background coming up is from the Monte Alban period of the Zapotecs and the Mixtecs.

GOODWIN: You've explained that many of these pieces were acquired in Mexico.

SHEETS: Yes. In the old days, Mexico didn't really seem to care too much about people bringing things out. I bought a great many things in Mexico. That hasn't been true now for a great many years. We have an agreement between the Mexican government and the United States government to send important things back when they're found here. It's a reciprocal agreement that has to be respected. This is an interesting figure, a Chinesco, very unusual both in size and in pose. It's a figure that I've enjoyed a great deal.

GOODWIN: Are you a very systematic collector or do you collect what appeals to you at the moment?

SHEETS: No, I collect what appeals. I don't think I'm systematic at all. Of course, in collecting you have to collect when you have an opportunity because the pieces rarely remain. You have to make up your mind. This is a nice stone head from the Valley of Mexico that I've always liked. I learned a long time ago that if you really want something and you feel that you can afford it, the thing to do is to get it, because if

you pass it by it's gone for all time. This is one of my pet pieces. This is a marvelous Khymer figure from Cambodia, and it's in such wonderful state, even though the arms and lower legs are gone and one ear. The rest of the head is absolutely perfect, never been damaged, and it's a beautiful piece. Of course the head was obviously knocked off and it's simply sitting there.

GOODWIN: Was this acquired, by the way, when you were in that part of the world?

SHEETS: I bought that in Thailand from a marvelous woman who is one of the great dealers and collectors in Thailand, who spent a tremendous amount of time in Cambodia. There's just a fraction of a very large fresco. It's a detail, but I love the painting in it. This is something I don't imagine they would allow out of Italy today. I bought it probably twenty-five or more years ago. It's a triptych in the school of Vivarini, and the central figure and the figure on the right have been, I think, relatively untouched. The figure on the left was painted over some, but it's a very decorative piece in its original frame. There's a whole family of Chinesco figures, as you see, from the big papa at the back, coming down to baby. Now we're getting some other figures in the foreground, which are on another table, but that's an unusual figure. It's flat as a little piece of pie crust, but it has a beautiful feeling in it, a funny little figure sitting on the lap.

GOODWIN: Is the arrangement of the objects in the collection essentially stationary, or do you like to shove things around?

SHEETS: No, we move them around, but I like things out in the middle so you can walk around them. This is a nice, very good Nayarit figure and that's a very archiac Colima dog that is admired by people who know Colima. It's very early, in this curled-up position with the strange little leg forms, but it's a beautiful pot. It's never been broken at all.

GOODWIN: This is a very large space. Do you remember the dimensions?

SHEETS: The gallery is about seventy-five feet long and twenty-six feet wide and fifteen feet high. I built it as big as the number of beams that I had, which were hand-adzed beams, and they came from a hundred-year-old bridge that was built up here in Mendocino County. A friend of mine bought the bridge, and then I bought the timbers from him, and he erected them in the most astonishing way. I've never seen anybody put beams up like he did. They're enormous and very heavy.

GOODWIN: Was the gallery built shortly after the house?

SHEETS: No, I didn't build the gallery until about four years ago. We put it off mainly because we weren't sure what we were going to do with the collection, but our kids seemed to want to have them here in one place, so

we built the gallery really for that reason. Those are just fragments of Greek Tanagras, but they're lovely little pieces. In this particular case, we have a great many objects representing a great many different cultures in Burma, Siam, and little bronze figures from Tibet.

GOODWIN: You've commented that the objects seem to speak to one another.

SHEETS: I think this is true. I think that good works, regardless of what culture they come from, speak to one another, like this Egyptian figure. It's a wooden figure from the great period of Ikhnaton, and I like it very much. I think he speaks to these Maya and other figures that are in the case. There seems to be a very happy relationship. I don't find any quarrel at all between them. He's really sitting there very quietly while this Mussolini-like figure from the Island of Jaina is pontificating, and these two men, warriors, I suppose, are standing by. But they are rare gems, these little figures, today. Practically nothing comes out of Mexico today representing this period. They had wonderful ideas about headdresses that, I think, are very decorative and very exciting. But how they could capture in about eight or ten inches of height the amount of dignity I just think is remarkable. Look at this old gentleman with his cloak and his shield. The poses are somewhat similar from figure to figure, but the modeling of course varies

a great deal, and very often the color. Now, these two ladies are very, very rare, both in quality and in size. Well, I've got a man between them. I'd forgotten about him. They are extremely well sculpted, and this one on the right has the most beautiful blue, which is very sought after and very, very rare.

GOODWIN: Do you ever sketch your pieces?

SHEETS: No, I never have really. I just loved seeing the resemblance between these figures and the people that live in Mexico and in Guatemala today. It's astounding how many of the poses and the way they sit and look are just alike. Of course that's a little, early Olmecan piece, that small figure, the fat man on the left. These Tlatilco figures with the large hips are very, very rare, and they are about 150 to 250 B.C. That pair of quite realistic figures, if you could see the whole figure, they're extremely well modeled. They came from the Chupicuaro area. This is a mask from Mexico in this transparent stone. I've forgotten what you call this transparent stone.

GOODWIN: Alabaster.

SHEETS: Alabaster, of course. This little figure in the foreground is Chinesco. Then we have these two strange guys at the back and a whole assorted group of different periods. Those are nearly all early Colima figures.

GOODWIN: It's so refreshing for me to see the figures arranged in this informal manner, where they're not boxed into tight specialties.

SHEETS: Well, I like mixing them up obviously. This is a beautiful piece, an Olmecan baby. The Metropolitan [Museum] borrowed this for their show celebrating their one-hundredth anniversary ["Before Cortez"]. This is another Olmecan crawling baby. Those figures are dated between 850 and 1100 B.C. and they're among the oldest things, except for the Egyptian piece that I showed you. But these are both very rare figures, these Olmecan babies. That's a pure Olmecan mouth, but see how Oriental it is? It has a very strong Chinese feeling. You could almost swear it was Chinese. This was an old Moroccan door that I had had for years and years and didn't know what to do with it, so I decided we'd use it in one side of a cabinet. I have a great friend, Frank Watrons, up here who makes beautiful furniture. He put it together for me. It makes a good base for some more figures. As you see, those are Tarascan dogs.

GOODWIN: We're now standing in the north end of the gallery and looking south towards the entrance.

SHEETS: That's right. When I built the gallery, I had an overhang from the guest house, which has a concrete roof, so it gave me a chance to build a series of niches. This door goes on through to a storehouse. But these

niches made very nice places to arrange figures. I've used different colors in them to make them more interesting. This figure is Burmese. The heads are Cambodian, and there is a contemporary pot in the foreground by Beatrice Wood.

GOODWIN: Do you ever have time to sit quietly in the gallery?

SHEETS: I do. I like to go out here, and I like to read out here and then look around while I'm reading. Of course, I love to go out to show things to people. I always feel refreshed because there's a kind of security. It's not the possession, but just in being around the kinds of minds that produced these things, minds that were able to put into stone or into clay or whatever the form, whatever the material used, that were able to inculcate as much spirit and timeless quality in the works, is a challenge to any artist. This is a Gothic polychromed stone Madonna and Child from south Germany. Here's a Chinese Tang camel and Tang vase. That's an early Han horse. Before the Arab horse was introduced, which gave the arch to the neck, the Chinese horses had these little short necks and big hammerheads, as we call them. They look mean, and they must have been mean.

GOODWIN: Here's something a little more contemporary.

SHEETS: This is a sketch done in bronze, by Carl Milles. It's part of a group for a large garden that he executed,

I believe in Maryland, called the Garden of Memories. He was given the commission, the last major commission he had, and he used for the figures some 100 figures of friends of his who had died. Those girls were a couple of young sisters who had died in an automobile accident when they were about eighteen. I like nature in every form, obviously, and these shells are always fascinating to me because of the incredible, almost infinite, variety of form and shape and color. And yet they have such a structural sense that is just fundamental to the idea of a shell, I guess.

GOODWIN: You also have a case of mounted butterflies, which we are unable to see.

SHEETS: Yes.

GOODWIN: It's amazing to me that most of this work is anonymous. We don't know who the individual artists and craftsmen were, but it really doesn't matter.

SHEETS: It really doesn't, and I think that that's the thing that you get from such a collection. It's like looking at a Gothic cathedral: you don't know who carved all those fantastic figures. You perhaps were more apt to know who painted the triptychs than you would the people who carved, but to think it went on for over a hundred years sometimes in one building, the work itself carried on over the years, it's very exciting.

GOODWIN: It might be something that comtemporary artists could learn about being modest.

SHEETS: I think our ego trips are pretty small by comparison to the kind of spirit that was inculcated in some of these pieces. This is an extremely unusual stone piece from India. It came from a temple somewhere in the desert east of Karachi, the Rajputan. There's only one other figure that I know of in the United States that came from that same temple. Dick Fuller found it when he was in India and it's in the Seattle museum. These are the only two pieces, and they obviously came from the same place.

These matrimonial pieces are very good. They call them matrimonial because they're married couples. These are archaic Nayarit and very, very good ones. That's a lovely little dwarf from Colima, along with an armadillo. This character is playing on a rasp some kind of rhythm and music.

GOODWIN: That looks like a Japanese screen.

SHEETS: That is a nice screen in the back. It's seventeenth century.

GOODWIN: There are several screens that run the length of that east wall.

SHEETS: I think they make a good background, and I like them just for themselves. This is a marvelous little Chinesco figure. They're very difficult to find of that quality. That's a pair of figures from the Guadalajara

area. They call them Jalisco, and it's a different style entirely. That's another Colima dog. This is an extraordinary figure from the east coast, the Vera Cruz region. It's sometimes called Juastecan, and I am very fond of this figure. He's a pretty strong character. It's a large figure, too, as compared to so many of the ceramic figures that you find.

GOODWIN: It's a great thrill for me to see this collection as well as your entire home here.

SHEETS: Well, it's great for me to have you here to see it, George.

* * *

GOODWIN: I'm in the living room of the main house at Barking Rocks with Mr. and Mrs. Sheets. This is the first opportunity we've had to meet and see Mrs. Sheets. Although it may sound like a chauvinist question, I do want to hear about the large family which has played a big part in your life. You have several children and grandchildren?

MRS. SHEETS: Yes, I don't think it's a bit chauvinist because, after all, what is more wonderful than having a lot of children? Yes, we have four children, and the oldest is Millard Owen Sheets, Jr. We always called him Owen to save confusion. He was born a year after we were married. He's now living in Hawaii, where he's a sugar

technician with one of the big plantations. So he and his family are living a real plantation life. He married a girl from Kauai, and they started off our population explosion with five children.

GOODWIN: You have a son who's an artist, too.

MRS. SHEETS: That's our youngest son, Tony. Then we have a daughter, Caroline, then a son, David, then Tony. Each one has added to the confusion and the celebration by having families: Caroline has three, David two, and Tony two--well, Tony three now. We have a couple of step-grandchildren, who are very dear to our hearts. So that makes fifteen. They're all doing exciting things and living very meaningful lives, which is great. So, what greater reward?

GOODWIN: Good. Another part of your extended family is not human but animal, because the Sheetses have been horse enthusiasts for many, many years.

SHEETS: Yes, I think that's like collecting. It's a disease, but a very happy one. I grew up with horses, and we always had horses when the boys were growing up. They rode from our house to Webb School, where the boys went to school. Then I've always, on the side, had one or two racehorses; and now I'm involved with friends of mine, and we have several. That's a great deal of pleasure for me to follow the breeding carefully and see these youngsters come along and race. I get a

great big kick out of it. Of course I've always loved animals. We've always had birds and cats and dogs and every other kind of animal, too.

MRS. SHEETS: Also goats and sheep.

SHEETS: A few wild ones, very exciting.

GOODWIN: This room, of course, is only one of the structures at Barking Rocks, and of course Mr. Sheets designed them all. We have a main house, a guest house, a gallery, a studio, an aviary, and several other structures.

SHEETS: It looks a little like a penal institution. [laughter]

GOODWIN: Tell us a little about the design of this room.

SHEETS: Of course we were very excited about the special view that you get out the window, and that's why we have large windows with this unusual fish-rock-island combination out in front of us. We see, of course, the incredible life on the island. At times we have as many as 3,000 sea lions, and the whales migrating back and forth from Alaska to Mexico come in very close, sometimes inside the bay. Then we have enormous migrations of birds. We felt that we wanted a really open view on that side. On the other hand, the rest of the house is fairly solid. We wanted to keep it on the ground and make it feel like it belonged here, so we used stone and wood, which has pretty well blended right into the background of the countryside.

When we built, these little pines were quite small. Now they're surrounding the house, and it's been very nice to see it settle in. We like the feeling of the stone, and there's so little to do except sometimes a little oiling of the wood--not much in the way of upkeep from the outside. And it's a pleasant house to live in.

GOODWIN: It's more than that: it's fascinating. We're now ready to take a walk over to the studio and see how Mr. Sheets works in between his numerous projects.

* * *

GOODWIN: Today is February 9, 1977, and I'm with Millard Sheets at the collection of the Virginia Steele Scott Foundation in Pasadena. Today we're going to try and give an overview of Mr. Sheets's work as a painter, but obviously this is an extremely difficult task, because he's painted well over 3,000 paintings, and we're going to look at only a handful, only about a dozen. Of course we're limited by the number of paintings here, but the Scott Foundation probably has the largest number of Mr. Sheets's paintings of any collection. There are about sixty here, I understand. Currently we're looking at some of the earliest paintings by Millard Sheets in the Scott collection. These three paintings date from the thirties, I believe.

SHEETS: This painting [Abandoned], I believe, is 1932,

if I remember correctly [actually 1934]. It was painted for the Carnegie International. I was invited, fortunately, all the years from 1930 onward as long as the shows were held, and I always looked forward to painting something special for Carnegie, and this is one of many paintings that I did for it. I was lucky to be invited because the last time they had an exhibition at Carnegie that was subject to a jury was in 1930, and it became something of a scandal. Only fifteen pictures out of several thousand were accepted. Being the only one west of the Mississippi River that was accepted, my painting did get probably more attention than it deserved, but they did invite me from that point on.

GOODWIN: How would you characterize the style of this painting, compared to some of your later work?

SHEETS: Well, I suppose it's more truly representational in one sense than some of the things that I do today, but this is where I grew up. This is in the Chino hills area, and it's an old farm that was abandoned during the Depression. It was a very moody place, and I was very much interested in dark and light as a design factor. I guess that's about all I could say as far as any special style. It grew right out of my own background.

GOODWIN: It's a very strong picture, I would say.

SHEETS: I like the feeling of it, and it holds up pretty well over the years. Of course it would be fun to repaint it.

GOODWIN: Right. This is an oil painting, but on either side we have two watercolors.

SHEETS: Yes, painted in the same area as the watercolor that you're standing by [River Bottom], that is, down in the same bottom land of Chino. I did spend a tremendous amount of time there. Though I was teaching at Scripps, I spent many weekends down in that area painting. I painted every kind of light and mood, and I think I learned more about painting in that period from going out and working directly from nature steadily every week than perhaps I ever learned at any other time. But it's, again a sort of moody thing down in the half-swamp, half-bottom land, where they had a few cattle in pasture. It's a very early one [1937].

GOODWIN: Let's take a look at this other watercolor [The House on the Hill].

SHEETS: Well, this was a painting of the same house actually that was in that oil painting. It was done on the scene as just a shot taken in place, whereas the other was a composition. I moved buildings around that had been in other parts of the area when I made the larger painting. But this was about the same period.

GOODWIN: Do you have favorite subjects or motifs?

SHEETS: Well, of course I love everything, really. I love landscape, the sea; I like people; I like particularly things with people and/or horses, which I love

very much because I've raised them all my life and I've been around them all my life. I'm afraid they crop into more pictures than the average person would use a horse, but it's because I like them very much. Also I like landscape, and I like old ranches and all things that have character. Although I'm not so much interested in the surface of every shingle as some painters are, I'm interested in the mood that you find in these places.
GOODWIN: Let's look now at some later work in another part of the gallery.

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We've actually jumped forward a great distance in time. We're looking at three paintings that date from the sixties, I believe. We have two watercolors on either side of the larger painting, but the larger painting is an acrylic. It's evident to me, especially in color, that this painting in particular [Familia Equus in Elysian Field, 1967] represents a dramatic departure from the paintings we just viewed.
SHEETS: Yes, this is about the period when I really became tremendously interested in color, apart from dark and light. You have to, of course, have dark and light in any painting, but as far as my new exciting interest in color, it developed about this period. I did a whole series of acrylics, as well as watercolors

and oils, that sent me into a whole new period of painting.

GOODWIN: How did that come about, Mr. Sheets?

SHEETS: Well, I think it came about because I realized after painting for a very long time that I was always stopped at a certain point. I never seemed to be able to go beyond a certain gate. I tried to analyze what it was that made me keep everything high-keyed to a degree, although those early pictures were low-key. Most of the painting preceding this was fairly high-keyed, and I think it was a precious attitude toward watercolor painting particularly that developed this within me. As I recognized the fact that the world is almost infinite in its variety and certainly in its moods, I found that you can put your picture high or low in dark and light, or you can give it brilliant and intense color, or you can have muted color, or you can have a combination of both, I realized that I'd been probably following a kind of routine, if not habit, as an approach to problems. So it was about this time that I decided that I would try to get as much color as I could against muted color. I think the reason that this seems to have a lot of color is that there are enough greys and muted colors in it to give you a sense of color. If you use raw colors all over, they fight each other. But if you have enough contrast between greyed and muted color against real

color, you get a greater sense of color. There's nothing particularly bright about this picture. It does have some yellows and some bright reds, but the value scheme is very close, actually. There's no real dark in it, and there's no real light in it. It's a muted picture, although it does have more sense of color.

GOODWIN: At this point in your work, are you still working closely with nature or are you freer to compose, say, in your own studio?

SHEETS: Well, I've been doing that for many years, working in the studio, but I've always felt that you have to do both. For me I find it extremely exciting to go out and paint, even today. Maybe I'm not as agile as I used to be, and it isn't as comfortable as it used to be sitting around in the cold and wind and on the ground, but I feel great when I go out painting. Then I feel equally excited to come back and work purely from the things that are in my head and the memory of beautiful things. Very often I make a painting from a little rough pen drawing that I might have made ten or fifteen years ago, and it wasn't even a very descriptive pen drawing, maybe just a few lines to suggest something. I go through files and sketchbooks and that kind of thing, sometimes, and work like that. This one is purely a composition, of course, with the elements that I like: flowers and hills and water and horses. But I like acrylic because it's a

medium you can work in on and on. I paint all my large murals in acrylic. It's much easier to work indefinitely with acrylic.

GOODWIN: Let's move in back here, looking at a painting called Spanish--whoops, that's the painting we just moved. This is a painting of India. No, Nepal. [Old Temple, Katmandu, Nepal, 1968]

SHEETS: Right. It's an old temple in Nepal. I probably became more descriptive here than I had done for a long time, but I was quite enamored with the temples and the architecture and the costumes of the people. On trips of this kind, I liked very much to make good records and notes which mean something to me, from which, again, your ideas flow more easily and freely when you get back in your studio, and sometimes even many, many years later. Of course, with that fantastic little piece of the Himalayas back there, you get some sense of the wildness of this country. But the rivers are very bold and strong. This one happened to be in a fairly dry season, but they really have fantastic rivers and unbelievable, dramatic landscape.

GOODWIN: This seems to be a much tighter painting than the one we just looked at.

SHEETS: Well, that's what I meant when I said that very often I work in a more descriptive sense to get material together and really figure out how that particular place

works. Then perhaps later on, not that I would paint this over again, but I might use this kind of thing in the background of a composition, where I would use it much more freely because I understand it. I like to feel that part of your work regularly is to research. It's to find out how things are made. I do love the facts sometimes, and this happens to be one of those times.

GOODWIN: You've painted everywhere in the world you've traveled.

SHEETS: Yes, I certainly have. That's one of the great things about watercolor as a medium. You can carry it with you so easily. When you're through, you put it in your portfolio immediately. You don't have to wait for oil paint to dry. It's very, very easy to travel with. I carry about fifty pounds of equipment with me when I go around the world, but that isn't too bad.

GOODWIN: Let's look at another scene from India, I believe.

SHEETS: No, that's also Nepal [The Cloth Dyers, Katmandu, Nepal, 1967]. It's along another river where they dye the material that they use for native costumes. It's dyed in long, long strips, then it's cut up later for use as a garment. But after they've washed it in the river all day, they stretch it out on the sand--it's fairly clean sand--and they let it dry out. Then it's

ready to be used. But it makes nice patterns, and the people are colorful.

GOODWIN: You've explained in the past that any painting, whether it's representational or not, should have a solid, underlying design. Does this painting have more of an abstract quality to you than, say, the one we just looked at?

SHEETS: Yes, I think so. It probably does have. I think just the arrangement of the stripes within the page and the river and the simplification of the landscape and all that, with those little buildings in the background, making it a shape against this as a shape--I think that's true. I try to do that in almost every painting. Sometimes you fail, but you try.

GOODWIN: How consistent do you feel you are as a painter? Are you pleased with most everything you do or are there rare occasions when you feel that you've done something especially rewarding?

SHEETS: Oh, I certainly feel that way. I've never painted anything I didn't try very hard to paint well. I have never painted anything just to make a painting. I've never turned out a picture in my life just for the sake of turning out a picture. But I do think that you do go through doors occasionally that are very exciting. When you go through that door, you know it, because the painting certainly reflects it. On trips, you gather

steam, as a rule. When I go, for instance to Tahiti for two or three weeks, or to India--it doesn't make any difference--or to Mexico, after about half of the time, you really warm up. It's not different than a football player. You get so with it that you begin to work very much more instinctively, and you put more of yourself into it. You're less involved with what you see. Every so often you go through a brand-new door, like this working in the new color a few years ago. I was, I suppose, hopped up in the sense that I had really broken through something that had bothered me all my life. I painted with great intensity for a long time with just the exhilaration of that sense of breaking through. But every painting is an effort, as far as I'm concerned, to find out something or to express something that I feel very deeply. Sometimes they certainly don't necessarily happen in the same painting. A lot of research is important to any development, I believe. Maybe I'm just a slow thinker and have to research slowly, but I continuously work at it.

GOODWIN: Good. Let's look at some more examples of your painting in the other side of the gallery.

SHEETS: All right.

* * *

GOODWIN: We're looking at three more paintings from the

1960s. The central painting is an acrylic, and the two outside paintings are watercolors. It seems to me that the central painting represents a more romantic and more fantastic kind of imagery than the two watercolors.

SHEETS: Well, it does. There's no doubt about it, George. I think this is closer to the way I paint today, much closer than the ones we've been looking at. Again, it's a composition made from just feelings about places. I've been along the sea of northern California practically the length of California, and there are many places that I enjoy, little bays and the marvelous trees that come right down to the water. This is purely a composition, but I feel freer both in color and in design when I work that way. There's no doubt about it.

GOODWIN: Let's compare it briefly to the landscape of Istanbul. [Istanbul, Turkey, 1971]

SHEETS: Well, in this case, if you've ever been to Istanbul, you know that the waterfront is a teeming place. In fact, the whole city is. With the excitement that these big mosques give to the skyline and the activity along the Bosporus, the boats and the shacks and the people, I suppose it's deliberately made to appear busy like the area felt to me. I've never been colder in my life that I was when I painted that picture, but I did paint it and I finished it right on the spot. It was a tremendously difficult thing because of the cold, but I

thoroughly loved Istanbul. I've been there many times.

GOODWIN: We've discussed earlier how you paint watercolor, but could you just briefly review the steps you follow in a painting like this?

SHEETS: Well, in a watercolor, of course, you depend upon the white of the paper to be your white pigment--you use no white--so naturally you have to preserve these lighter areas. At the same time, in order to make this water shine with the light on it, the sky had to come down far enough in value. So in this case, I threw a wash right over the whole background that was approximately the color of that sky. Oh, I think that perhaps had two washes on it. That way this whole thing all pulled together, and I might have wiped that out with a sponge halfway between these values. Just with one swipe you can do that. You build it up with underpainting the same way you put stud walls up before you put shingles or surfaces on the walls. I think that watercolor, when you feel that free about it, is much more fun than when you are precious about it and say, "Well, once over and that's it." That's what I meant a little earlier when I said to go down in value and to go into any kind of richness of tone, to hold this whole dark and at the same time make it luminous and open, you've got to get it down there first in value in order to make it really work against the greyness of that dark value, against

that sky. Watercolor is a very direct medium, but you have to build it just like any other medium.

GOODWIN: Are these whites that have been unpainted?

SHEETS: That's paper. That's unpainted. I've never used any white at all.

GOODWIN: Do you ever use a razor blade?

SHEETS: No, I don't. I don't think it's necessary. If I want to take something out, I can cut a little mask, a piece of paper, and use a sponge, and get pure white out of it without abusing the paper. I just don't feel happy about cutting it. I don't think it's necessary. If I want to paint a flock of sea gulls going right through there, I could take some shapes of cut-out sea gulls and make twenty-five sea gulls running right through the thing, all white if I wanted to. It's no problem. There's no reason to have to use a knife. I think it's a kind of abuse of the paper.

GOODWIN: Let's see exactly how you've done that with another painting on this wall. [Gulls Migrating, 1968]

SHEETS: Well, I don't believe that I actually wiped these out, but I think you can see the drawing of the birds, as I drew them in. These women come down to the pool to get water. As you see, there are three or four figures going back up toward the little village. As they come down, they nearly always raise a few birds. This is a case where you just have the simple trunks

of the trees and the roots and the pool and the birds and the women and that's it. But this one happened to be very thoroughly designed. I draw with a pen a great deal because I think it's a very nice quality. I use a pen that doesn't in any way bleed. It's waterproof. So when I commit myself, I've really committed myself. But I find it's good for me to do that, to make up my mind.

GOODWIN: We've noticed just from a few paintings that the horse is a favorite subject of yours, but it also is evident that birds are, too.

SHEETS: Yes, I love birds. I love everything about nature. I think the magic of life is so infinite that the more we can crowd our feeling about it into a painting the better.

GOODWIN: We're going to look at one more group of paintings in another gallery.

* * *

We're actually looking at a tapestry and not a painting [Falconers, 1960]. This was a tapestry that was designed as a result of Mr. Sheets's trip to the Negev, in Israel.

SHEETS: Yes, I had the real pleasure of seeing a large encampment of Bedouins, who were in the southern part of Israel, at the time I was there making a motion picture. They were having a marvelous time with their horses, as

many as fifty or seventy-five of them galloping at one time in a wild race. Then others were using their falcons. It was like going back to the sixteenth or seventeenth century. I loved the textures on the Negev. There is a very fuzzy, little growth that is kind of exciting, I think the tapestry has the spirit of it, as I remembered it. I had the pleasure of making the cartoon and then sending it to Aubusson in France, where it was woven.

GOODWIN: I've learned something in particular this morning that I didn't really anticipate. That is, in the past we've spoken a great deal about the importance of drawing--not only in your work but in the work of students--and it appears to me that color plays such a pervasive role in your painting, that you really have a very fanciful and romantic use of color.

SHEETS: Well, this again is about the same period as those two acrylics that we looked at. I think it was the reveling in the new use of color that made this perhaps seem more colorful to you. I love the subtleties in funny brown bushes and, of course, I like the spots on horses, and I like the textures that you get. But I am tremendously excited about color, and all of my large murals now, that I've done in the last ten or fifteen years, have shown this same thing because I'm really very much interested in color. You can't

separate it from drawing or values, but I think it's necessary to create a color chord in the same way that a musician creates chords. Whether you have it in dissonance or harmony, the chords must be there. This has been my search, I think, for the past fifteen years, particularly in all my painting. Even in my buildings, I work very hard to get this juicy quality, as though everything has been dipped in one kind of a juice.

GOODWIN: Mr. Sheets, is there a difference between your commercial style and your personal style?

SHEETS: Only because of the problems that are involved with a commercial work of art. You have an obligation to meet the needs of the problem, which does impose special restrictions. But as far as I'm concerned, there's absolutely no difference in my approach.

GOODWIN: I'd like to try and bring some loose ends together in terms of a conclusion to this project. I know art historians like to use labels, but I don't know what to do in your instance, because we've reviewed your work as an artist, architectural designer, educator, correspondent, diplomat, collector, equestrian--what kind of label do we put on you?

SHEETS: I don't think I have to have a label, do I? Don't you think that the important thing in life is to get the most out of it? As far as I'm concerned, everything I've done has been because I was intrigued and

excited about the potential of doing the thing. I have always thought primarily of myself as a painter. If I lived my life over again, though I might have been a better painter if I had not done these other things, I certainly would go through, I'm sure, the same kind of experiences. I've thrived on them, in the sense that I really believe in an artist being involved in life, not living in a special place unless he has very exceptional talent, which I, perhaps, don't have. I think there are people who can live in an ivory tower, but an ivory tower has never been for me.

GOODWIN: Thank you very much for participating in this project. It's been a pleasure.

SHEETS: It's certainly been my pleasure, and I certainly appreciate everything you've done, George.

GOODWIN: Thank you.

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